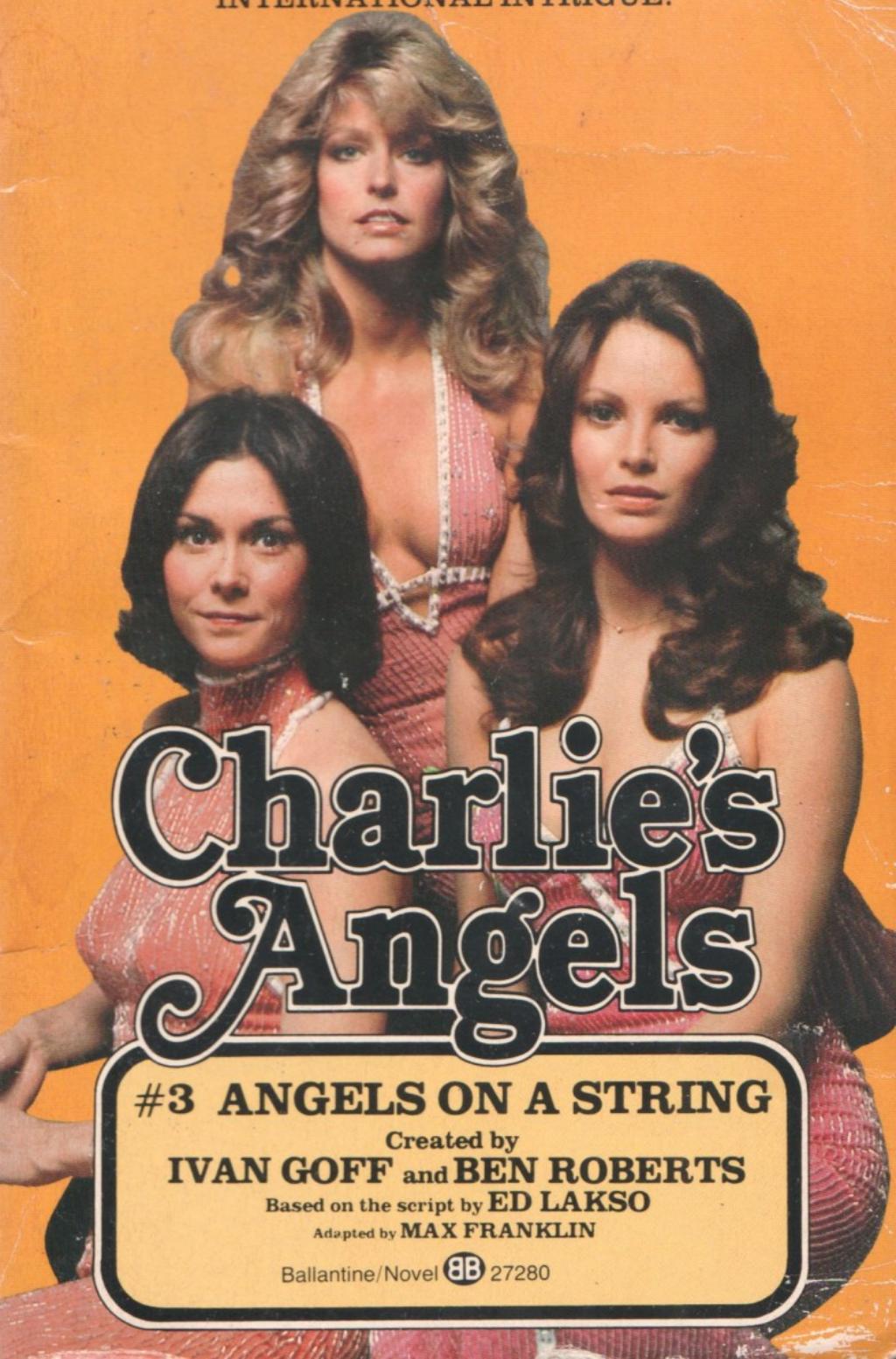


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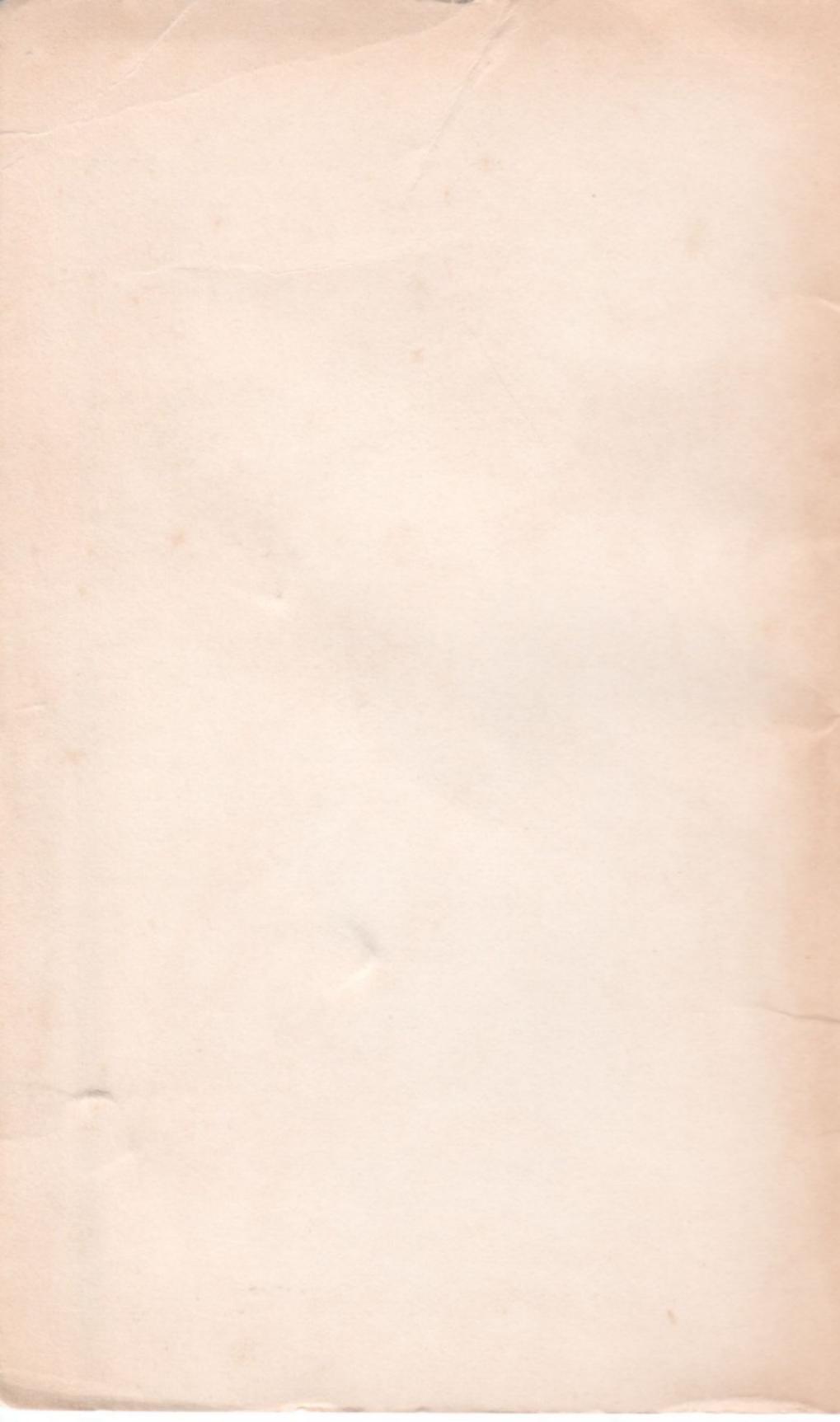
#3 ANGELS ON A STRING

Created by
IVAN GOFF and BEN ROBERTS

Based on the script by **ED LAKSO**

Adapted by **MAX FRANKLIN**

Ballantine/Novel  27280



Angels Rush In . . .

Jill continued to watch the chalet, but there was no sign of activity from the tiny lodging. Then, after about ten minutes, the fat man and the thin man emerged together. They walked around the building to disappear behind it, and a moment later the panel truck drove off. Jill saw Kelly follow in her car.

Jill stepped out on the porch, climbed the railing, and hurried across the grass to Chalet D. The door opened to her touch. Stripping away the Scotch tape still over the lock's bolt, she wadded it into a ball and tossed it into an ashtray in the front room.

She first checked the bedroom to the left. It was empty, as was the second one.

Presumably the two prisoners had been taken out the back door to be loaded into the panel truck. Jill was wondering puzzledly why the men had exited by the front door after taking the prisoners round out the back way when she found out. That had been for her benefit, she realized, when the fat man stepped from the bathroom with a nine millimeter automatic in his hand.

"Is pleasure to see you again," he said with a sardonic smile. "Please to be seated."

He indicated the bed with his gun muzzle.

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#3

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Ivan Goff and Ben Roberts

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"The Killing Kind" by
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A SPELLING-GOLDBERG PRODUCTION

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One

In a quiet section of Beverly Hills stood a square, two-story building with a bronze plaque just to the right of the high, brassbound oaken double doors. The plaque read simply "Townsend Investigations." There was no other indication that this was the central headquarters of the highest-priced investigator in the greater Los Angeles area: Charles Townsend.

Inside was a high-ceilinged entry hall with stairs opposite the front door leading to the second floor. Off the left side of the entry hall there was a sliding door, wide open at the moment, which led into the administrative office. The office was large, thickly carpeted and expensively furnished; although it had a desk with a telephone on it, it looked more like a drawing room than an office. The room contained a sofa, several overstuffed chairs, a large cocktail table and a built-in bar. A number of original oils by famous artists hung on the walls.

John Bosley sat behind the desk. Charles Townsend's chief administrative assistant was a cheerful, round-faced, slightly plump man of fifty with a full head of dark hair, neatly parted and worn moderately short. He had an open ledger before him and was talking to his employer on the phone. He wasn't holding the phone in his hand because there was a microphone and squawk-box attachment. The phone lay on the desk, off its hook.

Reading from the ledger, Bosley said. "Danworth case fee, twelve hundred fifty dollars."

He heard the sound of the front door opening and

closing, and a moment later Jill Munroe entered the office. A perfectly proportioned girl with classically beautiful features and a mass of ash-blonde, curling hair cascading around her shoulders, she carried a small suitcase in one hand, her purse and a tennis racket in the other.

"Hi, Boz," she said.

Bosley answered only with a nod, his attention focused on the ledger. But it partially transferred to Jill when she set her suitcase and racket on the sofa, took a wallet from her purse and began counting the money in it.

"Manager case fee, two thousand dollars," Bosley said in a slightly preoccupied voice.

Again there was the sound of the front door opening and closing, then Kelly Garrett entered the room. She was a slim, soft-featured girl with dark brown hair and dancing eyes, as beautiful in a totally different and more earthly way as Jill Munroe. She carried a suitcase and some clothing on a hanger. She laid both on the sofa next to Jill's things as Jill finished counting her money and returned the wallet to her purse.

Bosley's attention left the ledger entirely and focused on the two girls.

Townsend's voice came from the speaker. "Your voice is fading, Bosley."

"Just a moment, Charlie."

For a third time there came the sound of the front door opening and closing, and this time Sabrina Duncan entered the office. She was a lovely, clear-eyed brunette with a subtle air of breeding. She also carried a suitcase, and in the other hand had a rolled-up magazine.

The three attractive women were known as Charlie's Angels. All were graduates of the Los Angeles Police Academy, but had spent very little time as policewomen. They had graduated together, and were still brand-new recruits when they'd been individually approached by John Bosley, who made each the identical and unrefusale offer.

Bosley's proposition was that the girls resign from the LAPD to work for private investigator Charlie Townsend. Their jobs would require only periodic duty, with more time off than work, but they would have to be available for immediate call to duty at any moment. Each would be furnished with a phone attachment on which she would be required to tape-record exactly where she could be reached every time she left home. Bosley warned them that the work might be dangerous at times, but assured them they would always be on the side of righteousness, because Charlie Townsend screened his clients very carefully, and refused to accept assignments from anyone whose ethical or moral principles were suspect. They would never meet Charlie personally, although they would often talk to him on the phone. Their contact with their employer would always be through Bosley.

The inducement that made this strange proposition unrefusale was the salary, which was considerably higher than they could ever have expected to earn as policewomen.

An additional inducement was that each had been approached by Bosley. At the Police Academy they had become good friends, and probably none would have made the change if the other two had not been asked. The three of them talked it over, and decided to accept.

Setting her suitcase on the sofa next to the other girls', Sabrina unrolled her magazine and handed it to Jill.

"Guess who is going to be there this weekend!" Sabrina said with elation.

As Jill unrolled the magazine, Kelly went over to look at it too. It was a copy of *News World Magazine*, and the cover picture was of a bearded, round-faced man who looked about sixty, with deep-set, magnetic eyes. The caption read "Professor Peter Wycinski, Poland's Voice for Freedom."

Jill said, "Professor Wick-inski."

"Why-sinski," Sabrina corrected her.

Bosley said, "I get the impression an event of some

import is going to take place, and I have not been informed."

"Didn't Charlie tell you?" Sabrina asked.

Kelly said, "It's R and R time."

"Rest and rehabilitation," Jill translated, unnecessarily.

"Wait a minute," Bosley said. "Are we talking about a vacation?"

Charlie's voice said from the speaker, "Three days, Bosley. With pay."

After considering this, Bosley smiled. "How marvelously democratic. I've got a croquet set I've been dying to try out."

The three girls exchanged looks.

"Wrong, Bosley," Sabrina said.

Jill said, "Tell him, Charlie."

"Croquet isn't allowed?" Bosley asked in a surprised tone.

Charlie said with a touch of regret, "The idea was that *they* play—you work, Bosley."

Bosley looked from one to another of the three girls in turn. "Let me grasp this," he said with wounded indignation. "You three are going to flagrantly shirk your responsibilities at some spa while I sweat over a hot set of bookkeeping ledgers?"

Sabrina said kindly, "Bosley, bookkeeping is your thing." Taking the magazine back from Jill, she re-rolled it, picked up her suitcase and said, "Let's get moving, girls. It's a long drive."

As the other two girls picked up their luggage too, Bosley asked, "Charlie, you want me to pay them for doing nothing?"

Charlie chuckled. "As you said, Bosley, 'How marvelously democratic.' Have a good time, angels."

"We will, Charlie," Sabrina assured him.

"Sabrina, did I understand correctly that Peter Wycinski is going to be at the hotel while you're there?"

"Correct, Charlie. He's speaking at a banquet for the Polish-American Freedom League. According to *News World*, he is expected to make such an impor-

tant pronouncement that Assistant Secretary of State Emmet Peters is attending the luncheon."

"Do I detect a note of hero worship in your voice, Sabrina?"

"You certainly do, Charlie. I feel like a groupie with a ringside seat at a rock concert."

"The man must be old enough to be your father, child," Charlie said with mild surprise. "Or even your grandfather, if both he and his father were precocious."

"Sixty-seven, Charlie, but looks much younger. Anyway, it's his mind I worship, not his body."

"Oh. Well, take care. All three of you."

"We will, Charlie," the angels chorused. Then Jill asked, "What are you going to be doing while we're gone, Charlie?"

Charlie said, "As usual, I am immersed in something pretty hot, Jill. I'm after a really slippery customer this time, but anticipate an imminent capture."

He was telling the literal truth. He was immersed in a bubbling outdoor hot-tub, holding the phone in one hand and gripping the slippery ankle of a lovely young blonde covered with suntan lotion in the other. She was putting up a giggling and not very serious struggle to avoid being pulled into the hot-tub. She lost.

"What was that splashing noise, Charlie?" Kelly asked suspiciously. "And did I hear giggling in the background a moment ago?"

"Don't let your imagination run wild, Kelly," Charlie's voice admonished. "And don't worry about me. I now have the situation well in hand."

"I'll bet," Jill said, grinning at the other girls, all of them long since on to Charlie's double entendres. "Is she blond or brunette, Charlie?"

"What a question to ask your employer," Charlie said virtuously. "Bosley, did I say with pay?"

"Yes, sir," Bosley answered.

"Just kidding, Charlie," Jill said hurriedly. "Bye now. Bye, Boz."

The three angels hurried out before either Charlie or Bosley could say anything else. Bosley just sat there,

listening for the sound of the front door opening and closing again. When he heard it, he reluctantly returned his attention to the ledger.

In a resigned voice he said, "Wellman case, eighteen hundred fifty dollars." Then he peered more closely at the ledger. "No, wait, that's eighteen hundred sixty dollars."

When he heard no response, he said, "Charlie?"

There was still no response. Picking up the phone, he held it to his ear. All he heard was the dial tone, because Charlie had hung up.

Replacing the phone on the hook, he said aloud and in a mournful tone, "I am bereft."

Two

The resident population of the village of Lake Beaverdam was less than 500, but the tourist population was in the thousands. A good deal of the latter was housed at the Mountain Tarn Hotel, an eight-story building which, in addition to its own rooms, had a couple of dozen chalets along the water's edge.

The evening before the angels started on their vacation, six men were gathered in the living room of one of the chalets. The attention of four of them was centered on the other two. One of the two, a large, bearlike man of about fifty, sat in a straight-backed chair in the center of the room, in his undershirt and with a towel wrapped around his shoulders. A thin, dark man of Slavic appearance, about forty, was applying makeup to him. The thin man was obviously a master, because he was not doing merely a stage makeup job, he was changing the seated man's appear-

ance in a way that made the makeup undetectable even close up.

Periodically referring to a blown-up photograph in color, the makeup artist darkened the big man's complexion, shaded his eyes to make them seem more deep-set, gave him a few wrinkles, and applied a short, well-trimmed beard with spirit gum. When he finished, he stepped aside and looked around the group inquiringly.

A lean and wiry man in his mid-thirties with a hooked nose said, "You are a genius, Mateusz." He looked at the others. "Would his own mother know he was not her son?"

A tall, muscular man of about forty, handsome and stylishly dressed in sport clothes, took a roasted peanut from his pocket, cracked the shell, dropped the shell into an ashtray on an end table and tossed the kernels into his mouth. "How about the voice?" he asked.

"Speak, Josef!" the hook-nosed man said peremptorily, as though giving an order to a dog.

In a deep, mellifluous voice the bearlike man said, "Gentlemen, let me introduce myself. I am Peter Wycinski, formerly of Warsaw University, now Professor of International Relations at Harvard University, also Chairman of the President's Commission on Human Rights, not to mention being Honorary Chairman of the Polish-American Freedom League. It is good to be here."

The hook-nosed man crossed to a table on which a tape recorder sat. He switched it on, and after a moment's wait the same voice that had just spoken came from the speaker. "Ladies and gentlemen, it is good to be here."

The hook-nosed man switched off the recorder. "Any questions?" he asked smugly.

A short, heavyset, rather jolly-looking man with a countenance that seemed perpetually on the verge of a smile said, "What about you, Veech? I saw Rabitch in London once, and with that nose of yours, Mateusz is never going to make you look like him."

"Wycinski has never met Rabitch," Veechek Nowak

said. "And Rabitch has never been in this country before, so no one at the luncheon will know what he looks like. A passport in the name of Anton Rabitch, with my photograph on it, is in the process of being made up. It will be delivered in the morning, in plenty of time."

The fourth observer, a grossly fat man with multiple chins, moved in close to the bearlike man to study his disguise. "Is good," he said approvingly. "Even close, looks natural." He turned away. "Remove now the disguise, Mateusz, until tomorrow."

"Yes, sir," the makeup artist said, moving with alacrity to begin removing the makeup with cold cream.

The fat man turned brooding eyes on the hook-nosed Veechek Nowak. "Perhaps would have been wiser, comrade, to take no chances? To get someone could be made by Mateusz to look and talk like Anton Rabitch?"

Nowak said uneasily, "There wasn't time, Comrade Bartkowiak. There will be no problem. As I said, no one around here has ever seen Rabitch."

Walther Bartkowiak swung toward the handsome man in sport clothes. "Your name?" he inquired crisply.

"Paul Kuznicki."

The fat man looked at the heavyset man with the jolly look. "And yours?"

"Karl Janoski."

Bartkowiak focused his attention on the two of them together.

"You know when Rabitch is to arrive, and by what route?"

The handsome Paul Kuznicki cracked another peanut and tossed it into his mouth. "We copped a peek at the wire he sent reserving a room here. He'll be arriving by car about ten A.M. tomorrow. We made a call to LA and had a friend check out what he'll be driving. He's rented a car, and we have its description and license number. There's only one road

he can take here through the San Bernardino Mountains. We'll be waiting. You shouldn't worry."

The fat man frowned. "Is my job to worry," he said in the tone of a colonel speaking to a private. "Is your job to obey orders."

Kuznicki seemed unperturbed by the reprimand, but he made no reply.

After waiting for him to make one, the jolly-looking Karl Janoski replied for him. In a deliberately insulting drawl he said, "We're not 'comrades,' comrade. We're just hired help. *And* American citizens. So don't get too snotty, or you can shove this job."

The fat man's nostrils flared in outrage. Swinging back to Veechek Nowak, he said, "You went outside the Party, you fool?"

The hook-nosed man's face turned a deep red. "You gave me forty-eight hours to make near-impossible arrangements, comrade. Paul and Karl have no allegiance to the Party, but they have no allegiance to anything else either. I needed two pros fast, and they are top pros. Besides, they *are* Poles, even though they're both second generation."

Looking back at the two hired gunmen, the fat man said grumpily, "Suppose there is no help. American citizens or not, you obey orders or you not get paid. Understand?"

"Sure, Comrade Bartkowiak," Paul Kuznicki said soothingly. "Don't pay any attention to my partner. He listened to too many Bicentennial speeches last year. We do good work with no mess. As I said, you shouldn't worry."

When the makeup artist finished removing the last of the makeup from the bearlike Josef, the big man got up and went into one of the two bedrooms. Closing and latching his makeup kit, Mateusz carried it into the other bedroom.

Paul Kuznicki said to his heavyset partner, "We're free as birds until tomorrow morning. Let's run over to the hotel cocktail lounge and see what we can pick up."

"You always get the cream, while I end up with

something fat and fifty," Karl Janoski grumbled, but nevertheless he followed Kuznicki out.

When the door had closed behind them, the fat man said to Nowak, "You can trust those two?"

"So long as they get paid."

"Something goes wrong, suppose? Investigation there will be, naturally, after the professor's suicide. Suppose the police arrest those two?"

"How could that happen, comrade?" the hook-nosed man inquired. "Why should there be any arrests for a suicide?"

Bartkowiak made an impatient gesture. "Could happen. Anything can happen. Good Party members would take life in prison before talk. But those two?"

Nowak said grudgingly, "They wouldn't remain silent out of loyalty to us, I'm sure."

"Then it would come out that the professor is not who made the speech. No?"

"That's possible," the hook-nosed man agreed.

"Only one safe course," Bartkowiak said crisply. "When is over, those two—" He made a cutting motion across his throat.

"All right," Nowak agreed without any change in either tone or expression. "I will see to it personally."

Early the next morning Paul Kuznicki and Karl Janoski left the hotel in their rented Ford sedan. Although Anton Rabitch's telegram had indicated he wouldn't arrive until ten A.M., they were in position by 7:30. As Kuznicki had told the fat man, they did good work.

They picked a "scenic view" point on the virtually trafficless mountain road leading to Lake Beaverdam from the turnoff from State Route 18. From that elevated spot they could see sections of the mountain road to the west for several miles. The heavyset Janoski studied every approaching car from that direction through twenty-four-power Japanese binoculars. Kuznicki merely leaned against a front fender of the car, enjoying the view and periodically tossing peanuts into his mouth.

Fortunately they were both patient men, because they had a two-hour vigil. At 9:30 the heavyset man, focusing on a car still three-quarters of a mile away, said matter-of-factly, "White Cadillac sedan, California license six-zero-four-O-M-B."

Tossing a final peanut into his mouth, Kuznicki said, "That's it. Let's go."

Quickly both men moved to the Ford sedan. Tossing the binoculars into the backseat, the heavyset man took the wheel. He drove only about a hundred yards east before pulling over on the shoulder just before a curve, at a point leaving a straight stretch of road about fifty yards long behind them.

Both men jumped out. Kuznicki lay on his back on the road shoulder immediately behind the Ford, and Karl knelt next to him in the position to give artificial respiration, facing the road, but with his head turned toward the approaching Cadillac.

The sound of the car engine came to them. Just before it rounded the curve fifty yards behind them, Janoski began to give the prone man fake artificial respiration. He kept it up only long enough to allow the driver of the Cadillac to see what he was doing, then pretended to become suddenly aware of the approaching car, jumped to his feet, ran out into the road and held up a palm.

The Cadillac braked to a halt, the driver ran down the right-hand front window and looked out inquiringly. He was a slim, rather good-looking man in his mid-thirties.

Running over to the open window, Janoski said with simulated panic, "Listen. My friend, I think he's had a heart attack. Please, can you help me with him?"

"Move aside so I can pull over," the Cadillac driver said.

The plump man stepped out of the way, the Cadillac pulled over on the shoulder to park just behind the prone man and the driver got out. He ran over to kneel next to the man lying on his back.

The supposed victim grinned up at him. As the man gazed down at Kuznicki in astonishment, the hard edge

of a palm smashed into the side of his neck from behind. He pitched forward to be caught by the shoulders by the man lying on his back.

Pushing the unconscious man aside, Kuznicki climbed to his feet. He took the duped victim by the shoulders, Karl Janoski took his legs and they carried him over to the Ford. After they had dumped him on the floor of the backseat, Janoski rounded the car to get behind the wheel. His handsome partner took a small leather case from his pocket, removed the hypodermic syringe from it and gave the unconscious man a shot in the arm. Then he stepped back, slammed the car door and said, "Okay, Karl, I'll follow you."

He ran back to get into the Cadillac. The Ford pulled away and he followed.

On the outskirts of the village, Kuznicki lightly beeped his horn, then pulled the Cadillac over on the shoulder and parked. Beeping acknowledgment, Janoski continued on.

At the hotel the heavyset man parked the Ford behind the chalet, got out and went inside. Fat Comrade Bartkowiak, Veechek Nowak, the bearlike Josef and the makeup artist were just finishing breakfast in the front room, all in their shirtsleeves and tieless.

"Somebody give me a hand," Janoski said. "I got Rabitch outside."

"Your comrade?" Bartkowiak asked. "Where is?"

"Waiting at the edge of town in Rabitch's car."

The fat man nodded approvingly. To the makeup artist he said, "Mateusz, give to Mr. Janoski assistance."

The two men went out together. By the time they had carried in the unconscious man, the hook-nosed Nowak had put on a necktie and jacket. Janoski and Mateusz took Rabitch into one of the bedrooms. Bartkowiak and Nowak followed along.

As they lay the man on the bed, Nowak asked, "What did you do to him?"

"Just shot a little sleep juice into him," Janoski told him. "He'll wake up tomorrow morning in time for the accident."

"Accident?" Bartkowiak said inquisitively.

"He'll run off a cliff on the mountain road on the way back to LA," Nowak explained. "Since the car will burn, he'll be identifiable only by his papers. It wouldn't do to have a body that appeared different from the Anton Rabitch who attended the dinner."

Bartkowiak nodded approvingly. "You have planned well, Comrade Nowak. With dead by suicide the professor, and dead by accident Rabitch, who will suspect it was not Peter Wycinski himself who made that speech?"

"Who indeed?" Nowak asked. "Come, Karl, take me to Mr. Rabitch's car so that I can get checked in at the hotel."

He and Karl Janoski went out together.

Three

The angels all went in Jill's car on their three-day vacation. Jill drove, with Sabrina beside her and with Kelly in the backseat. It was less than a two-hour drive from Beverly Hills to Lake Beaverdam, and they had left shortly after 8:30. It was approaching 10:00 when they reached the foothills of the San Bernardino Mountains.

In the backseat Kelly was worriedly examining her tennis racquet, wondering if she should have it restrung. Sabrina was trying without much success to hum along with Chopin's "Polonaise," which was playing on the car's tape deck.

"Haven't we had enough symphonic music now?" Jill asked. "How about a little rock or folk for a change of pace?"

"Shhh!" Sabrina said. "I'm trying to listen."

"You're a sketch," Kelly said.

Sabrina turned in her seat to look over her shoulder. "Listen, you want to get in the mood for Polish, listen to the 'Polonaise.' "

Jill threw an amused glance at Kelly in the rearview mirror. Kelly smiled back at her.

Sabrina said, "I confess *I'm* his greatest fan."

"For a movie star or a quarterback," Jill said, "anyone can be a fan. For an international political figure like Peter Wycinski, you've got to have—" She paused to search for a befitting term, and came up with: "International *sympatico*."

"I got a gang of *sympatico*," Sabrina said. "And you would too, if you read some of his books. He lays down some very heavy stuff."

Kelly advised, "There'll be so much security around, you'll never even see Wycinski. The place will be full of press people, cameras, the whole package."

Shrugging, Sabrina said, "Listen, a glimpse from a hundred feet, the trip would be worth it. Meanwhile, we're on vacation. I'll work on my backhand."

Jill suggested, "Maybe if you wander around humming the 'Polonaise' very loudly, he'll think you're Polish and make a move on you."

Rolling her eyes upward ecstatically at the thought, Sabrina said, "Heaven!"

From the seat beside her, Kelly picked up the copy of *News World* picturing Peter Wycinski on its cover and opened it to the cover story.

Skimming over it, she said, "Sixty-seven. A sixty-seven-year-old man. She's got a crush on a sixty-seven-year-old man."

"Giant," Sabrina corrected her.

They soon topped a crest giving them a view of the village of Lake Beaverdam. Down below, about a quarter-mile ahead, a Ford sedan was making a U-turn to park behind a white Cadillac pulled over on the shoulder.

"There's our hotel," Sabrina said excitedly, pointing to the building in the village towering eight stories at

the edge of the lake. "You think the professor is already there?"

"You can ask the desk clerk when we get there," Jill told her.

As they neared the two cars parked on the shoulder, a lean man with a hooked nose was getting out of the Ford's passenger side, and rather handsome man in sport clothes was climbing from behind the wheel of the Cadillac. The hook-nosed man went over to get into the Cadillac as the man in sport clothes approached the Ford with the evident intention of getting into it. As the girls went by, he cracked a peanut shell, tossed the kernels into his mouth and looked them over.

"Hey, there's something more suitable for you, age-wise," Kelly said to Sabrina.

"Not my type," Sabrina said. "The only peanut eaters I like are elephants."

In the village Jill swung the car into the circular drive going past the main entrance of the Mountain Tarn Hotel. When she halted the car, a uniformed doorman immediately came over.

"Reservations, ladies?" he asked as the three girls got out.

"Yes," Kelly said.

The doorman blew a short blast, then a long one on a whistle, which brought both a red-coated bellhop and a parking attendant running. Jill opened the car trunk for the bellhop, then exchanged the keys with the parking attendant for a cardboard stub.

As the bellhop loaded their bags onto a luggage cart, the angels surveyed the cluster of vehicles parked nearby. There were two sheriff's cars, a pair of limousines and a mobile TV unit, none with anyone in them.

"Looks as though he's here," Sabrina said. "Also looks like we'd have seen him if you'd driven a little faster, Jill."

"On that mountain road?" Jill said. "We might not have gotten here at all!"

As they followed the bellhop pushing the luggage cart into the hotel, a white Cadillac pulled up in front.

Glancing over her shoulder, Kelly said, "There's the Caddy we saw on the edge of town, when they were trading drivers."

The other girls looked back also.

Jill said, "Yes. Wonder what that was all about? Ran out of gas, maybe, and that was a gas-station attendant bringing him back to his car?"

Sabrina asserted "He wasn't carrying a gas can. And as Kelly said, they *were* trading drivers."

"Let's not worry about it," Kelly suggested. "This is a vacation, remember? We've no time for mysteries."

Considerable activity was going on in the lobby. Two TV cameras were being set up, and a large number of people were milling around, some of them with press cards pinned to their lapels, if they were male reporters, or to their blouse fronts, if they were women.

"Looks like you may see him after all," Jill said to Sabrina. "They must expect the professor back in the lobby soon."

They stopped before the desk, and the brisk young man behind it said, "Yes, ladies?"

"Reservation for three in the name of Kelly Garrett," said Kelly.

"Ah, yes, Miss Garrett. Welcome to the Mountain Tarn."

He placed a registration card before her.

As Kelly began to fill it out, Sabrina nodded toward the TV cameras and asked, "I assume that's all for Professor Wycinski?"

"Yes," the desk clerk answered. "He's holding a press conference in the lobby at eleven-thirty."

When Kelly finished filling out the card, the desk clerk gave her two keys, and handed the third to the bellhop. Kelly gave Jill and Sabrina each a key.

"I'll take the one the bellhop has when he's through with it," she said.

"Enjoy your stay, ladies," the desk clerk said with a smile.

"We plan to," Jill assured him.

The clerk turned to the lean, hook-nosed man who

had come up behind the girls as Kelly was registering.
"Yes, sir?"

As the girls moved off behind the bellhop, they heard the man say, "Anton Rabitch. I wired for a reservation from Los Angeles."

The bellhop led the three girls past the elevators and along a hallway to the lakeside, or rear, of the hotel. Keying open a door numbered "7," he stepped aside for the girls to enter first.

"Isn't first floor more expensive?" Sabrina asked Kelly with a frown.

"I didn't ask for first floor," Kelly said. "I just asked for space for three."

Inside, the three of them halted to gaze around in awed dismay. It was a luxurious suite with a huge, beautifully furnished living room containing a built-in bar in one corner, completely stocked with liquor. Through open doorways off either side they could see equally beautifully furnished bedrooms. On a coffee table before a long, expensive sofa sat a large basket of red roses.

Sabrina said on a high note, "Kelly, you've got to be kidding. What's the tab for this—this small city?"

"I don't understand," Kelly said puzzledly. "I asked for about medium rates."

There was an envelope pinned to the flowers. Withdrawing a card from it, Jill read aloud, "Stop worrying, Sabrina. It's on me. Enjoy, angels. Love, Charlie."

In a relieved voice Sabrina said, "You heard the man: enjoy!" Then she frowned. "How'd he know I'd be the one worrying about the cost?"

The other two girls merely looked at her and smiled. Sabrina smiled back sheepishly. "I grew up poor," she said.

"You grew up poor?" Kelly said with raised brows. "I grew up in an orphanage. That's why I like luxury now. I never had any as a kid."

Sabrina went into one of the bedrooms and Kelly stepped into the other. Jill told the bellhop just to

unload the luggage on the front-room floor, and they would distribute it themselves. While she was tipping him, Sabrina and Kelly passed each other going from one bedroom to the other.

Jill went over to look in the room Kelly had entered. It was as huge as the living room, and had two queen-sized beds. She crossed to look in the other one. It was only slightly smaller, and had a king-sized bed. Sabrina came out and went over to open the living-room drapes. Sliding glass doors looked out onto a porch with some lawn furniture on it.

Coming from the other bedroom, Kelly announced, "I have been consumed by an irresistible need."

"You want the king-sized bed?" Jill asked.

"No, a new swimsuit. I saw a terrific little shop off the lobby."

Jill pulled her tennis racquet from the stack of luggage, examined the strings and frowned at a broken one.

"And I need to get this fixed, so I'll go with you." She looked at Sabrina. "You need anything?"

"Just a few lungfuls of this mountain rarefied," Sabrina said, sliding open the glass door.

Jill and Kelly headed for the door, Jill carrying her racquet, Kelly clutching her purse. Just before they went out, Kelly called back, "We'll meet you at the pool."

Sabrina stepped out onto the porch. It was elevated from the ground only about two feet, and was surrounded by a balustrade. Similar porches were on either side of her, and a few yards to her left another wing of the hotel jutted toward the lake. It seemed to contain cheaper rooms, because there were only narrow, iron-railed balconies outside of them instead of porches.

Leaning against the balustrade, Sabrina tipped her face skyward, closing her eyes, and let the sun bathe her face. A mixture of male voices came to her from the right. Opening her eyes, she glanced that way and saw no one. Then she saw that the sliding glass doors of the suite next door were open, and realized the voices were coming from within.

She glanced the other way, idly running her gaze over the windows of the wing at right angles to the one she was in. It settled on a second-floor window where a man stood behind the glass focusing binoculars her way. She stiffened with indignation, then relaxed again when she realized they were not focused on her, but on the suite to her right. From that angle, apparently the man could see through the sliding glass door into the suite.

The man with the binoculars was short and heavy-set. Another, taller man appeared behind him, but the interior of the room was too dim compared to the outside sunshine for her to make him out very clearly. There was something tantalizingly familiar about the way he tossed something into his mouth, though.

Both men suddenly stepped back from the window, as if afraid of observation. Glancing to her right to see what had alarmed them, Sabrina's breath caught in her throat.

A large, bearlike man with a close-cropped, neatly trimmed beard had stepped out on the porch next door. Sabrina recognized him from his photograph on the cover of *News World* as Professor Peter Wycinski.

Four

Sabrina gazed at the professor in blissful hero worship, stunned by her good fortune in getting to see him so close up. He didn't notice her, gazing out over the lake and breathing deeply and with evident enjoyment the clear mountain air.

A tall, efficient-looking man in a blue business suit and with a short haircut stepped out on the porch behind Wycinski. His neatly pressed suit and crisp man-

ner gave him a sort of junior executive air, but it didn't fool Sabrina. She instantly classified him as some kind of cop.

He said to the big man's back, "Professor Wycinski, I've scheduled the television interview to be at eleven-thirty in the lobby."

Turning around, the professor said in a deep and mellifluous voice that curled Sabrina's toes, "Fine, Mr. Haller. Just fine."

Three other men now stepped out on the porch. Two—official-looking, stern-faced men in their thirties—flanked the third man on both sides. The third man was the hook-nosed man who had registered at the hotel just after the three angels.

The man Wycinski had called Haller gave the two men flanking the hook-nosed man an inquiring look.

One of them said, "We cleared him."

"Professor Wycinski!" the hook-nosed man said warmly, taking the big man's hand and shaking it with enthusiasm. "This is a great pleasure! A great pleasure!"

Wycinski looked at Haller with puzzlement. The latter shrugged.

Realizing neither man knew who he was, the hook-nosed man produced a leather folder that Sabrina guessed was a passport and handed it to Haller. "I'm sorry," he said contritely. "I babble like a fool. Anton Rabitch, Polish Freedom Fighters in Exile." He turned to Wycinski. "I wired you from London."

Smiling, Wycinski took the man's hand again and shook it cordially. "Of course. I am very pleased you could come."

Turning sober, Rabitch said, "My friend, they have taken over Poland, but there are hundreds of us in London who fight for the day our country will be free again. And thousands of Polish-Americans who welcome you here, and offer love, and affection. We of the Freedom Fighters offer, in addition to that, protection."

Handing back the passport, Haller said in a relieved voice, "Glad to have you aboard, Rabitch. I'm Haller,

FBI. Officially we're only here to protect the Assistant Secretary of State."

"Yes, I know," the hook-nosed man said, nodding. "How I know! You must not offend the official pigs who sit in our consulate in Los Angeles."

Haller shrugged. "Protocol."

"I understand, my friend. So! I am here to officially help you while you unofficially protect the professor."

"Personally, I'm very grateful," Haller told him. He checked his watch. "You could do us the service of standing by now, if you would, while we check security in the hotel lobby. The professor is holding a news conference there at eleven-thirty, you know."

"No, I didn't," Rabitch said. "But I am happy to be of service. I assure you the professor will be safe in my hands."

He pulled back his coat to show a gun in a shoulder holster.

Hiking his eyebrows, Haller asked, "Permit?"

"Of course. One of the chief deputy sheriffs of Los Angeles County is Polish."

"I'm sure the professor is in good hands," Haller said with a smile. "I understand you Freedom Fighters are expert with all weapons."

Smiling back modestly, Rabitch said, "Suffice to say that you need not worry."

Checking his watch again, Haller said, "We'll be back at about eleven-fifteen, professor. You'll be ready?"

"I'll be ready," Wycinski confirmed.

As Haller and his two assistants went back into the room, Wycinski took the hook-nosed man's hand for a third time. "Again, my friend, thank you for coming."

"It is my pleasure, professor," Rabitch assured him. He glanced through the open sliding door. "They have gone. I will just take the precaution of locking the door behind them."

He went back inside. Wycinski turned to look out once more over the lake, but this time swung in the direction of Sabrina and spotted her. He halted without completing the turn, to examine her with interest.

Thrilled to be noticed, Sabrina lifted her right hand and timidly wagged her fingers.

Grinning widely, he vaulted over his porch rail to the ground, came over to step up on the ledge edging her porch, set his hand on the railing and vaulted over it too. The jumps were performed rather cumbrosomely, but not without grace—rather as a sure-footed bear would perform them.

Gazing up at him with shining eyes, she said, "And I didn't even hum the 'Polonaise.' "

Not quite certain what she meant, but nevertheless charmed, Wycinski asked, "Do you know the 'Polonaise'?"

She hummed a few bars, astonishing herself by doing it quite well. He looked pleased.

"Do you like slivovitz?" he asked.

He looked at her expectantly, as though vitally interested in her answer. That unnerved her enough to make a wild guess.

"He danced with the Warsaw Ballet?"

When he affected a look of mock disappointment, she quickly made another stab at it.

"He holds the Polish high-jump record?"

The big man laughed with enjoyment. Raising a thick finger in caution to wait for his return, he vaulted back over the railing, crossed to his own porch, vaulted that railing too, and disappeared into his suite. A moment later he reappeared, carrying a slim, narrow-necked bottle. Two more vaults and he was back on her porch. Giving her a conspiratorial wink, he carried the bottle into her suite. Puzzled, she followed him.

After a glance around, the professor went over behind the bar. After a curious glance at the well-stocked liquor shelf, he lifted two wine glasses from beneath the bar and poured them half full of colorless fluid from the bottle. Handing one to her, he lifted his toward her.

"Slivovitz," he explained.

Understanding, she giggled. "You must think me brilliant. Warsaw Ballet . . . high jump . . ."

"I think you charming," he said gallantly. "*Naz drowie!*"

Touching her glass to his, she said, "*Naz drowie!*"

They drank. He smacked his lips appreciatively. Sabrina momentarily looked as though she had swallowed a hot pepper.

"It's made from plums," he said.

When she recovered her breath sufficiently to answer, Sabrina said, "Who'd've believed?"

Breaking into laughter, he pulled a large cigar from his pocket. He said something in Polish.

"Old Polish proverb?" Sabrina hazarded.

Nodding, he translated, "Never underestimate a plum."

Taking an ornate cigar lighter from his pocket, he lit his cigar.

"That's a brand-new Polish proverb," Sabrina accused. "You just made it up."

He shrugged modestly. "What is your name, pretty one?"

"Sabrina Duncan."

He put the lighter on the bar. "I am—"

"My god," Sabrina interrupted. "I know who you are: Professor Wycinski."

He bowed his head in acknowledgment. "My friends call me Peter."

"My friends will never believe this. Do you climb from porch to porch often?"

Winking at her, he said, "Not often enough, I think."

Tossing off the rest of his slivovitz, he set down the glass and came from behind the bar. He began to pace up and down with sudden animation.

"It must be that I'm in a good mood today," he said. "I am going to see my son for the first time in four years."

"Jon Wycinski," Sabrina said. "Age, thirty-six. Profession, lawyer. Two years in the Peace Corps. Last two years has been working with underground freedom groups behind the Iron Curtain. Just returned to his home in San Francisco."

Surprised, the professor stopped pacing. "Yes."

"Your wife was killed in the war. You raised Jon by yourself. When the Communists took over Poland, you sent him to this country and began your 'war of words.' "

Intrigued, Wycinski said, "You know a great deal about me."

"I've read nearly everything you've written. I know you're giving this speech tonight, and the Assistant Secretary of State is here with you, to explain a resolution you both drafted to present before the General Assembly of the United Nations. The pundits are all guessing that the resolution will be an attempt to stop the Communists' influence in all the Eastern Bloc countries."

The big man gazed at her, both impressed and moved. "In that pretty head, so much information."

"And a lot of respect for what you're doing," Sabrina said sincerely.

"You touch me," he said, smiling at her almost tenderly. Then he had a sudden thought. Looking at his watch, his expression became regretful. "Haller and Rabitch will be worried. They are my watchdogs."

"I know you have to go," she said, also regretfully. "I know you have a news conference."

"And luncheon with Assistant Secretary Peters afterward." He offered his hand. "My son is unmarried. Considering my age, I suppose I should introduce him to you."

"He's coming here?"

"Any moment. You will meet us after my luncheon with the Secretary?"

"You're on," Sabrina said in a pleased voice.

Squeezing her hand, he said, "This little time I've stolen from you, I am very grateful. *Do widzenia.*"

Not understanding the words, but understanding that they were a closing salutation, she repeated, "*Do widzenia.*"

He leaned down to give her a quick kiss on the forehead, then picked up the bottle of slivovitz and went back out on the porch. She went as far as the door to watch him vault the two railings like a youth-

ful bear again. He went into his own suite without looking back, closing the sliding glass door behind him.

Suddenly remembering the man with the binoculars, and realizing he must have been spying on Peter Wycinski, Sabrina looked left toward the second-floor window where the man had stood. He was no longer in evidence, but the taller man, who had been standing behind him, now stood at the window looking toward Wycinski's suite. When he tossed a peanut into his mouth, she suddenly recognized him. He was the man who had vacated the white Cadillac for the hook-nosed Anton Rabitch to drive, and had climbed into the Ford that had brought Rabitch.

Puzzled, she gazed up at him for a long time, trying to figure out what his interest in the professor could be. He and the shorter man with binoculars must both be members of the organization Rabitch had mentioned and seemed to head, she decided. What had it been? The Polish Freedom Fighters in Exile, she seemed to remember. Probably Rabitch had posted them there to help protect Wycinski from possible attack by one of the lunatics who periodically sent death threats to controversial figures.

The tall man froze in the act of cracking a peanut shell when he finally noticed Sabrina looking up at him. Dropping her gaze, she closed the sliding door and pulled the drapes over it.

Looking at her watch, she saw that it was nearly eleven. She decided to go to the lobby to look for Kelly and Jill, then catch the news conference.

Five

In the area of small shops off the hotel lobby, the sporting-goods store where Jill took her racquet to be restrung was just across the hall from a women's dress shop. As Jill came from the sporting-goods store after leaving her racquet, Kelly came from the dress shop carrying a shopping bag.

"Get your swimsuit?" Jill asked.

"Yes, and I'm dying to show it off! You going to put yours on?"

"Not now," Jill said. "But I'll look at yours."

They walked together to the pool area. It was glass-enclosed, just off the lobby, with sliding doors around three sides. At the moment these were all open because it was a warm day.

Jill sat at a poolside table while Kelly went to the women's locker room. In a few minutes Kelly returned wearing a revealing pink-and-black two-piece swimsuit. She pirouetted for Jill's approval.

Jill emitted a silent whistle of admiration. "Shirley Babashoff, eat your heart out."

Sabrina came through the archway from the lobby. Kelly turned toward her and struck a pose with one hand on her hip.

"Backstroke, anyone?" she asked.

Sabrina, still in a happy state of shock, was oblivious to anything but the tremendous news bottled up inside of her and bursting to get out. She didn't even notice the swimsuit.

"Do you know what I've been doing?" she bubbled. "I've been having slivovitz with guess who?"

"What is slivovitz?" Jill asked.

"Plum brandy."

Jill measured her with a dubious look. "Plum brandy?"

"It puts you on instant alert," Sabrina said happily.

Kelly tried another position in the hope of catching Sabrina's attention. Sabrina still didn't notice the swimsuit.

Jill asked quizzically, "How did you come across this odd nectar?"

In a proud voice Sabrina said, "Professor Peter Wycinski gave it to me."

"Professor Wycinski?" Jill exclaimed with raised brows.

"We toasted each other."

"You and Wycinski together?" Jill said unbelievably.

"In our room."

Kelly tried another pose, then stopped short to stare at Sabrina.

"Our room?" Jill asked.

"He has the suite right next to ours," Sabrina said with enthusiasm. "He came over the porch railing. Vaulted it like a deer." After a pause, she amended that to, "Or more like a moose, maybe."

Jill exchanged glances with Kelly, whose expression indicated she didn't believe Sabrina either. Kelly said, "Let's go over this again. Professor Peter Wycinski hurdled his sixty-seven-year-old body onto our porch and marched into our suite bearing a bottle of plum brandy?"

"It sounds a little wild," Sabrina admitted.

Jill and Kelly looked at each other again, and decided to humor her.

"Makes perfect sense," Jill said.

Kelly nodded. "Only last week Rosalynn Carter leaped through my kitchen window with a quart of chili."

Sabrina gave her an irritated look. "You don't have to believe me," she said huffily.

"Oh, but we do," Jill said in the soothing tone of a nurse trying to quiet a mental patient. "Every word."

"Stop that," Sabrina said with even greater irritation. "You don't have to patronize me. You two are just jealous because you weren't there!"

A murmur of voices was heard from the lobby. All three girls looked that way to see Peter Wycinski crossing it toward the TV cameras, flanked by the hook-nosed Rabitch and FBI agent Haller. The other two FBI agents Sabrina had seen on the next-door porch were running interference through the crowd.

Sabrina went over to the archway, followed by the other two girls.

Jill said, "Well, if it isn't the old porch jumper himself."

Sabrina threw her an annoyed look over her shoulder, then turned back to watch Wycinski. When the man's gaze briefly touched her, she smiled and wagged her fingers at him. He looked at her blankly. Puzzled she waved again. This time the hook-nosed Rabitch saw the wave and flashed the professor a warning look. Wycinski turned his eyes away.

Both puzzled and hurt, Sabrina muttered, "Something's wrong."

She moved farther into the lobby, and Jill and Kelly trailed after her. Near the television cameras a tall and lean man of about sixty stood surrounded by a group of people. Sabrina recognized him from news photos as Assistant Secretary of State Emmet Peters. Wycinski moved to him and the two men shook hands.

Someone called, "Airtime five minutes, everyone!"

"So I have time to straighten this out," Sabrina muttered.

She began to work her way through the crowd toward Wycinski. Flashbulbs were popping and reporters were jumping the gun by throwing questions before the news conference began. Outside the ring of reporters the three FBI men and Anton Rabitch were preventing onlookers and gawkers from pressing in.

When Sabrina succeeded in worming her way to the inner ring, FBI Agent Haller held up a restraining palm.

"I'm sorry, miss. Security."

"The professor and I are friends," Sabrina said.

Haller glanced at Rabitch, who studied Sabrina estimatingly, then gave his head a slight shake.

"We are," Sabrina said indignantly.

Haller said, "I'm sorry, miss. You'll have to stand back."

Feeling a tap on her back, Sabrina looked over her shoulder to see Jill and Kelly right behind her. Jill motioned for her to give it up and come with them. Annoyed, she turned back to the FBI man.

"Listen, my name is Sabrina Duncan."

Pulling out a leather folder and opening it in front of her face, Haller said with exasperation, "My name is John Haller, Federal Bureau of Investigation. The professor is very busy. Now, if you don't stand back, I'm going to put you under arrest."

Sabrina was rendered speechless by the cold and threatening words. She offered no resistance when Jill took her arm, gently pulled her away and led her back to the pool area.

In the archway Sabrina turned to look back, puzzled and hurt and embarrassed. "Something is wrong," she said. "Something is very wrong. Why did he cut me like that? He was going to introduce me to his son."

Jill and Kelly looked at each other. Kelly spoke. "You didn't mention that before."

"I hadn't gotten to it. You both acted as if you didn't believe me— Oh, what's the use!"

Jill and Kelly looked at each other again, now becoming humble-looking. In an attempt to change the subject, Kelly said brightly, "Listen, why don't we all get into our tennis clothes and try the courts. I mean, that's what we came here for, isn't it? Fun, right?"

Jill said, with forced enthusiasm, "Remember what Charlie said. A vacation. Enjoy!"

Glancing from one to the other, Sabrina said wearily, "Stop humoring me. I'm telling you, I talked to him in our room."

"All right," Jill said, wanting to end the subject and

ease the tension. "You talked to him. He's got a short memory."

Sabrina gave her head a definite shake. "No, his memory's fine. He's frightened. I'm telling you, *something is wrong.*"

"If there is, there's nothing you can do about it," Kelly said reasonably. "That FBI man isn't going to let you near him. Go change your clothes, Sabrina. I'll get my clothes from the locker room and be along."

"I have to go back to the sporting-goods store," Jill told them. "My racquet won't be ready until tomorrow, but they told me I could borrow one if I needed it. I'll see you in the suite too, Sabrina."

She walked off in one direction, and Kelly walked off in the other. Sabrina re-entered the lobby and skirted the crowd to reach the hallway leading to their suite.

She heard a voice call, "Quiet, please! Forty-five seconds."

She didn't tarry to hear the news conference. She continued on to the suite.

The luggage was still in the center of the living room. Sabrina carried her suitcase into the bedroom with the two queen-sized beds, leaving the choice of the king-sized bed to the other two girls.

After transferring the contents of her suitcase to the drawers of one of the two dressers in the room, and setting the suitcase on the floor of the closet, she changed to her tennis outfit. She had just finished when Jill came in carrying a racquet.

"Not up to mine," Jill said, bouncing the strings against the heel of her hand. "That's not an excuse, though. I'll still beat both of you."

"I took that dresser," Sabrina said, pointing. "You get the choice of beds."

"The one nearest the other dresser," Jill said, dropping her racquet on it.

Going back out into the other room, she returned carrying her suitcase. She set it on the bed and began unpacking.

Picking up her own tennis racquet, Sabrina wan-

dered out into the front room. Her wineglass was still on the end table where she had set it. She picked it up. It was still half full, because she had never taken the second sip. She marched back into the bedroom with it.

"Slivovitz," she said, thrusting the glass at Jill. "I never finished mine."

Accepting the glass, Jill sniffed at it, then cautiously sipped it. Her eyes widened.

"Strong," she said. "You didn't make it all up."

"Why would I make up such an absurd story?" Sabrina demanded.

"Don't be angry with us, Sabrina," Jill said. "You have to admit it was far out. I guess we thought you were—well, fantasizing to impress us. What psychiatrists call 'ego-building lies.' "

"You think I'm a couch case?" Sabrina inquired sardonically.

"Of course not," Jill said, a trifle defensively. "I believe you now. You *couldn't* make up this stuff." She handed back the glass. "Guess he does have a short memory."

Sabrina shook her head. "It's something else. I think he's . . . frightened."

She carried the glass back into the living room and over toward the bar. But as she neared the bar, she halted, transfixed. Lying on the bar, next to Peter Wycinski's empty glass, was the ornate lighter he had used to light his cigar.

Setting down her glass, she tossed her tennis racquet onto the sofa, picked up the lighter and left the room.

Hearing the door open and close, Jill called from the bedroom, "That Kelly, Sabrina?"

She got, of course, no answer.

Jill finished unpacking and changed into her tennis outfit. Picking up her racquet, she walked out into the front room and looked around. The sight of Sabrina's tennis racquet on the sofa brought a slight frown to her face. Gazing into the other bedroom, she found it as empty as the living room.

She turned at the sound of the door being keyed open. Kelly entered, dressed and carrying her swim-suit in the shopping bag.

"Hi," she said. "Where's Sabrina?"

"I don't know," Jill said. "She took off without saying anything, and without her racquet. Look at this."

She led the way over to the bar and pointed to the two glasses side-by-side. Lifting the one with some fluid in it, she handed it to Kelly.

"Taste it," she instructed.

Kelly sniffed at it first, then sipped. She looked surprised.

"Slivovitz," Jill said. "Sabrina didn't finish hers. She was telling the truth."

Six

The televised news conference was just ending as Sabrina got to the lobby. She heard the voice of the director call, "Cut!" Then the group around the cameras began to break up. Professor Wycinski and the Assistant Secretary of State moved in the direction of the dining room, surrounded by their security guard.

Sabrina heard a middle-aged man say, "That was a lot of nothing. All it boiled down to was that they'll tell us all about it tonight."

"And we won't be at the banquet," the woman with him said.

"Well, it's going to be televised too. We'll watch it in our room."

Sabrina followed the two celebrities and their entourage as far as the door to the dining room, and watched the professor and the Assistant Secretary

being escorted by a hostess to a table for two against the far wall. The three FBI men and Anton Rabitch seated themselves at a table for four a few feet away, between the men they were guarding and the door.

Sabrina went over to stand before Haller. When he frowned up at her, she thrust the cigar lighter in his face.

"Mr. Haller," she said distinctly, "would you mind returning this to Professor Wycinski?" She raised her voice enough for the two men seated against the wall to hear too. "*Tell him he left it in my room.*"

The professor gave her a startled look, then redirected his attention to the Assistant Secretary, as though he had not heard. Rabitch and the three FBI men all turned to look toward the other table. Not having caught Wycinski's startled reaction, they assumed he had been too engrossed in conversation to overhear the remark.

They all stared back at Sabrina. Haller took the outthrust lighter from her hand, examined it and gave Rabitch an inquiring look.

"He was in your room?" the hook-nosed man inquired.

Sabrina couldn't decide whether to be furious with Wycinski for snubbing her, or alarmed because he might be in some kind of trouble. But she had no mixed emotions about Haller and Rabitch. She wanted to put them in their places.

"As I said, we're friends," she said sweetly.

Rabitch again glanced toward the professor, then turned back to Sabrina with a wry expression on his face.

Gently, in a reasoning tone meant to make her understand without hurting her feelings, the hook-nosed man said, "Miss, I have only just met the professor, but those of us deeply involved in the freedom for Poland movement know everything there is to know about him, including his personal habits. It seems he privately loves the company of young women. Publicly, of course, he has an image to protect. I'm sure you understand."

While Sabrina was considering this explanation, Rabitch reached out to take the lighter from Haller's hand. "Perhaps it would be less embarrassing all around if I returned the lighter."

Sabrina made a rueful little face, feeling let down by the professor and embarrassed in front of the three FBI men and Rabitch at being branded just another passing fancy of a dirty old man.

"Thank you," she said stiffly. Then to Haller, whom she still didn't like, "Apology accepted."

The FBI man's expression indicated he was truly about to issue an apology. Belatedly he started to come to his feet, and the other three men followed suit. Sabrina didn't wait either for the apology or for the men to finish rising. Turning, she stalked from the dining room.

From the lobby, she spotted Kelly coming along the hall from the direction of their suite, dressed for tennis and carrying two tennis racquets. Sabrina stopped to wait for her.

Halting before her, Kelly asked, "What happened to you? You forgot your racquet." She extended Sabrina's racquet, handle first.

"I'm out of the mood for tennis," Sabrina said, but nevertheless she accepted it.

"Jill showed me the two glasses and had me taste the slivovitz. Sorry we didn't believe you."

"It's all right," Sabrina said in a depressed voice. "Where is Jill?"

"Went ahead to the courts. We're to meet her there."

"You go ahead," Sabrina said. "I'd only be a drag. I feel like getting drunk."

"Don't let the professor get you down," Kelly advised. "Maybe he's just a love-'em-and-leave-'em sort of guy."

"I just found that out," Sabrina said bitterly. "There was more evidence of his visit than the slivovitz dregs. He left his cigar lighter on the bar. I just returned it to that FBI man in the dining room. He and two other FBI men and that Polish Freedom Fighter with

the hooked-nose are seated together only a few feet from where the professor and the Assistant Secretary of State are lunching tête-à-tête. I spoke loudly enough for Wycinski to hear me, he looked directly at me with no sign of recognition, then away again."

Kelly said with sympathy, "Okay, so the professor has a few flaws. He's still a world beater where it counts, right?"

After considering this, Sabrina gave a grudging nod. "I suppose it's just my vanity that hurts. That Rabitch man said he had a weakness for young women. That made me feel like a nickel." Her tone then became querulous. "The professor told me he wanted me to meet his son, right after his luncheon with the Assistant Secretary. Why would he say that if it was just a leering little game to him?"

"His son's here?" Kelly asked with surprise.

"Due here. I think I'll check at the desk and see if he's arrived. Maybe *he'll* know what's wrong with his father."

She went over to the desk with Kelly trailing along. The same brisk young man was on duty.

"Has Mr. Jon Wycinski checked in yet?" she asked.

The desk clerk didn't even have to check his records. "The professor's son? No, ma'am."

"When are you expecting him?"

"Any minute. He said noon."

"Thank you," Sabrina said, turning away.

"Maybe you'd feel better if you had a bite to eat," Kelly said. "It's lunchtime. Let's collect Jill and go to the coffee shop."

"All right," Sabrina agreed.

But when they arrived at the tennis courts, they found Jill playing with a handsome young tennis pro.

Kelly said, "Think she'd appreciate us breaking that up?"

"Would you?" Sabrina countered.

"No. Let's go have lunch by ourselves."

Kelly and Sabrina passed back through the lobby just as Wycinski, the Assistant Secretary of State and their security guards emerged from the dining room.

The only one who appeared to notice them was the hook-nosed man. Throwing an apologetic smile across the lobby to Sabrina, he raised one hand slightly in a salute. Sabrina ignored him.

Wycinski and the Assistant Secretary paused in the center of the lobby for some final words before parting. Naturally the rest of the entourage stopped too. The hook-nosed man gazed thoughtfully after the two girls as they disappeared into the coffee shop.

Turning to Haller, he asked, "Is the professor going back to his suite now?"

"I believe so," the FBI man said. "He indicated he wanted to work on his speech some more this afternoon."

"You plan to stay with him?"

"Yes. Miller and Bates will cover the Assistant Secretary."

"I think I'll leave him in your hands then," the fake Rabitch said. "I have a couple of matters to attend to."

"Sure, take your time," Haller said. "We really don't expect anything to happen anyway. It's just routine coverage, because there's always the chance of some psycho taking a pot at anybody with controversial political views."

Wycinski and the Assistant Secretary parted at that moment, with mutual assurances that they would see each other at the banquet that evening. Haller went off with Wycinski, while the other two FBI men accompanied the Secretary.

The hook-nosed man went over to a house phone and called room 247.

Paul Kuznicki's voice answered, "Yeah?"

"Veech," the hook-nosed man said. "Meet me in the lobby right away."

"Sure," Kuznicki said. "Two minutes."

Hanging up, the fake Anton Rabitch went over to the door of the coffee shop and peered in. The two girls were seated in a wall booth across the room. After locating them, he faded back out of sight.

When Paul Kuznicki appeared, he had the heavy-set Karl Janoski with him.

The hook-nosed man said, "I don't need you, Karl. But now that you're here, why don't you go over to the chalet and spell Mateusz or Bartkowiak?"

"Sure," Janoski said agreeably, and walked off.

"What you got for me?" Kuznicki asked.

"Go over and look into the coffee shop. Make it casual. Notice the two girls in tennis outfits in a far booth against the wall. Blonde and brunette, extremely attractive."

Kuznicki walked over to glance into the coffee shop, turned around and came back.

"You sure know how to understate," he said. "Extremely attractive? They're knockouts! The brunette, she's the one Wycinski visited."

"I know," the hook-nosed man said wryly. "She wanted to renew the friendship, and it got a little embarrassing. Josef didn't know who the hell she was, and I couldn't very well brief him in front of three FBI men and the Assistant Secretary of State."

"Josef learns his lines, but he isn't very fast on the uptake, is he?" Kuznicki commented.

"We were somewhat limited in our choices," the fake Rabitch said dryly. "Considering that he had to bear at least some resemblance to Wycinski, be the same height and weight, be able to imitate his voice exactly, and we wanted a Party stalwart, I think we did quite well."

"I wasn't criticizing," Kuznicki told him. "I think you deserve the Red Star for setting this up as well as you did on such short notice." After a pause, he added, "But Comrade Bartkowiak is probably the one who'll get it. I have a feeling he'll take all the credit if it works, and give you all the blame if it doesn't."

After considering this, the hook-nosed man frowned.

"He some special friend of yours?" Kuznicki asked.

"Just my superior. Actually I never knew him before this mission."

"You know he's going to do what I said, don't you?"

The frown deepened. "What are you getting at?"

"The same sort of accident could happen to him as

is going to happen to Rabitch. For an additional fee, of course."

A slow smile formed on the hook-nosed man's face. "That's funny," he said.

Kuznicki hiked an eyebrow. "It is? Why?"

"If I decide to take your kind offer, I'll explain it. Meantime, we have the problem of this girl."

"Who is she?"

"Just a celebrity worshiper. I think she's been discouraged by now, but just to be sure, check her out."

"Pleasure," Kuznicki said.

"Better make sure she doesn't try to contact the professor again. Think you could entertain her all afternoon?"

Kuznicki's handsome face split in a smile. "I get paid for this kind of work? You ever need a full-time employee, just say the word, Veech."

Seven

Their waitress came over to the booth where Kelly and Sabrina sat, and asked, "More coffee?"

"No thanks," Sabrina said for both of them. "Just the check, please."

"It's been taken care of," the waitress said, nodding toward a man standing by the cash register. "The gentleman over there."

The waitress moved away. Both girls examined the indicated man.

"The peanut eater who turned over the Cadillac to your friend Rabitch," Kelly said.

Sabrina said, "Also the roommate of a short, wide guy who was watching Professor Wycinski through binoculars just before he visited me. They're on the second floor of the wing to the left of us."

"Some kind of spies?" Kelly asked.

"I think they're with Rabitch. Polish Freedom Fighters in Exile. I think they're helping guard the professor. Should we let him pay our bill?"

"Should one look a gift horse in the mouth?" Kelly inquired.

"He isn't saving us a nickel," Sabrina told her. "I was going to sign for it. And Charlie's picking up the check, remember?"

"Maybe Charlie will appreciate our keeping expenses down," Kelly said. "But make up your mind fast. He's coming over."

The man sauntered over and smiled down at them. "I hate coming on so fast," he said. "But this kind of scenery is rare around here. May I?"

Sabrina looked him over. He was attractive, relaxed and friendly. And presumably on Professor Wycinski's side. Despite her disappointment in the professor, she still approved of everything about him except his personal habits.

Nodding for him to sit down, Sabrina said, "I could do with a little ego boosting."

Sliding into the booth next to her, he said, "I'm Paul."

"Paul what?" Kelly asked.

He gave her a quizzical look. "We need last names? Okay, I got nothing to hide. Paul Kuznicki."

"Kelly Garrett," Kelly said. She nodded toward Sabrina. "Sabrina Duncan."

"Nice to know you both," he said courteously. He looked at Sabrina. "You look sad." To Kelly he said, "Somebody been raining on her parade?"

"She just found out one of her idols has feet of clay," Kelly said.

"All that action in the lobby a little while ago?" he said to Sabrina. "Your idol was in *that* crew?"

Nodding, Sabrina said sadly, "Feet of clay, mind of gold."

Reaching into his pocket, he drew out a peanut,

shelled it and tossed the kernels into his mouth. "Who were those people, anyway?"

Sabrina examined him from narrowed eyes. Certainly he knew who Professor Wycinski was.

Kelly answered, "The Assistant Secretary of State, and Professor Peter Wycinski, no less."

"The Assistant Secretary of State and *who?* Wycinski?"

Why was he pretending not to know the professor, Sabrina wondered? Then it hit her. He wasn't helping protect Peter Wycinski; he was part of whatever had been done to the professor to put him in such an emotional state that he looked at friends without recognition. Suddenly she became convinced that Wycinski wasn't simply a dirty old man who slavered after young women. A little pixieish, perhaps, but he *had* sincerely liked her, and he *had* meant it when he said he wanted her to meet his son. Somehow his brilliant mind had been brought under control by his enemies, so that they were able to dictate his thoughts.

But what was the hold they had on him?

Kelly was saying, "Big political powwow in the banquet room tonight."

"How about that?" He turned to Sabrina. "You know one of them?"

You know very well I do, Sabrina thought. *And you've been sent by his enemies to find out just how well I know him, and if I'm a threat to your plans.*

She said, dismissingly, "Brief encounter. Very brief. Nothing."

"Which one?"

"The professor," she said. "You didn't know he was here?"

Cracking another shell and flipping the peanut into his mouth, he said, "No, I'm not into politics much."

He didn't mean to pump her about her relationship with the professor, she realized. How could he, after denying any interest in the man? What did he want?

She found the answer by the process of elimination. If he didn't intend to pump her, the only goal he could

have was to keep her away from the professor. He meant to latch on to her so that she would never be alone long enough to attempt contact.

A plan to shake him instantly jumped into her mind.

"What room are you in?" she asked.

He looked surprised. Kelly looked more than surprised.

"Two-forty-seven," he said.

"Well now!" Sabrina said. "Two, forty and seven are my lucky numbers."

Smiling, he asked, "Are they mine, too?"

Batting her eyes at him seductively, Sabrina said, "This place has no ambiance."

Hardly believing his luck, Kuznicki said, "Gotta have ambiance."

"Knew you'd feel that way," Sabrina said, squeezing his bicep.

She prodded him with her elbow to get out of the booth. He stood up, grinning with anticipation. Sliding from the booth also, Sabrina gripped his arm. He threw a what-can-I-do? look at Kelly and led Sabrina toward the door. Kelly gazed after them in astonishment, totally bewildered by Sabrina's actions.

At the door into the lobby Sabrina suddenly stopped. "My purse!" she said, dropping his arm and darting back to the booth.

Actually she hadn't brought a purse. She grabbed up Kelly's, who accepted this stoically, realizing Sabrina was playing some kind of game.

"Two, forty and seven are not your lucky numbers," Kelly said.

"He's lying," Sabrina whispered. "He's not protecting Wycinski. He's part of what's wrong with the professor."

"Oh, Sabrina, come on," Kelly said. "This is getting out of hand."

"I saw him watching the professor," Sabrina said. "And this was no accident. He's watching me. He wants to keep me from getting to Professor Wycinski."

After gazing at her for a moment, Kelly nodded, convinced. "Okay, what do you want me to do about it?"

"Have Jill follow him when he leaves his room. I've got to get into Wycinski's suite. I'll meet you in our suite. Fifteen minutes."

"All right, Sabrina. I don't know what this is all about, but I'll follow along on faith."

Sabrina returned to the waiting Paul Kuznicki. "What was all the gab?" he asked.

Hooking her arm in his and squeezing against him, Sabrina said, "She was trying to talk me out of going with you. I think she's shocked. I am awfully impulsive, I guess."

Steering her in the direction of the elevator, he asked, "She your chaperone or something?"

"Just a friend. But she's always worrying about the way I act with men. She thinks I'm not demure enough."

"You're demure enough for me," he assured her.

Two-forty-seven was also a suite, but not nearly as elaborate as the one the girls had. There was a small living room with no bar, flanked by bedrooms on either side with ordinary double beds in them.

As Kuznicki closed and locked the door, Sabrina glanced around. "Two bedrooms," she said. "You're not living here alone?"

"Don't worry about it. My buddy's gone for the day." He made a waving motion about the room. "Ambiance."

Studying the scene with pursed lips, Sabrina said, "Needs champagne. And hot water."

"Hot water?" he repeated, puzzled.

"I have a thing about showers."

After considering this, a slow smile formed on his face. Nodding to the right, he said, "That one's my bedroom. There's a shower off it."

Then, as Sabrina started for the bedroom, he asked, "Any special kind of champagne?"

Pausing in the doorway, she said, "Dom Pérignon fifty-five." She gave him a smile of promise. "It's the only thing that works for me."

She went on into the bedroom, closing the door behind her, but slowly . . . letting him continue to see the

smile of promise until it was cut off by the closed door. He picked up the phone.

"Room service," he said when the switchboard answered.

When a voice said, "Room service," Kuznicki continued, "Need some champagne, room two-forty-seven. Do you have Dom Pérignon fifty-five?"

"Oh, yes, sir," the voice said with what struck him as a strange note of respect.

"Good. Bring it up. Two glasses."

After closing the bedroom door, Sabrina glanced around. As she suspected, a door led from the bedroom out into the hotel hallway; the hotel's suites had that additional convenience. Opposite this second door was the door to Kuznicki's bathroom.

Checking the closet, she found a number of shirts on hangers among the clothing there. Selecting a white one and a necktie, she carried them into the bathroom. She wrapped the collar of the shirt around the shower head and tied it in place with the necktie. Adjusting the water to hot, she turned it on full blast and closed the glass shower door. On the other side of the translucent door the shirt billowed and waved in the rising steam like a naked body being soaped.

Leaving the bathroom door open, she quietly crossed the bedroom and let herself out into the hall.

In the living room Paul Kuznicki paced up and down impatiently, listening to the tantalizing sound of the running shower. When nearly ten minutes passed without room service appearing, he cautiously eased open the bedroom door and peered in. Seeing the bathroom door wide open and hearing the shower still roaring, he tiptoed across to look in there. The writhing white figure on the other side of the glass shower door nearly drove him wild. He ran back into the living room and was reaching for the phone to light a fire under room service, when a knock came at the door.

He ran to it and jerked it open. An ancient wine steward in a red velvet suit pushed in a cart on which nestled a silver ice bucket containing a bottle of cham-

pagne. There were two glasses, a linen towel, and a display of cheeses and crackers.

"What'd you do, stomp the grapes yourself?" Kuznicki growled.

"Hardly, sir," the steward said coolly.

He handed Kuznicki a check.

Kuznicki started to sign it, then blanched. "Two hundred eighty dollars!"

In an unperturbed voice the old man said, "There's no charge for the cheese and crackers, sir."

Indecisively holding his pen over the check, Kuznicki glanced toward the sound of the shower, then signed so savagely that he ripped the check slightly. The steward accepted it calmly, stepped away from the cart and waited for his tip. Giving him a withering look, Kuznicki pulled out a money clip and examined the bills in it.

"Got change for a twenty?" he asked.

"No, sir."

On the verge of a breakdown, Kuznicki ripped a twenty from the clip, shoved it into the old man's hand and jerked open the door for him. When the steward walked slowly out, he slammed and relocked the door.

His gaze on the bedroom door, which he'd left open, Kuznicki nervously wrapped the champagne bottle in the linen cloth, as he had seen waiters do, unwound the wire from around the neck of the bottle and pressed upward on the cork with his thumbs. The cork hit the ceiling and a stream of foam gushed from the bottle.

"Jesus!" he muttered. "That's forty dollars' worth on the rug!"

He got the neck of the bottle over one of the glasses before it stopped gushing, filled that one, then the other. Picking the cork up off the floor, he reinserted it partway into the bottle and set the bottle back in the ice bucket. He carried the two glasses of champagne into the bedroom and set them on the dresser.

His gaze again fixed through the open bathroom door on the writhing white form in the shower, he hurriedly stripped and tossed his clothing on the bed. Then, lift-

ing both wineglasses in one hand, he went into the bathroom and pulled open the shower door.

For a few moments he gazed at the dancing white shirt in stunned disbelief. The two glasses fell from his hand and smashed on the floor of the shower.

Turning off the water, he rushed back into the bedroom and began to redress, emitting a steady stream of curses as he pulled on his clothing.

Eight

Kelly arrived at the tennis courts to find Jill and her handsome tennis pro just getting ready to head back to the hotel.

Introducing the man as Bud James, Jill said, "We're going to lunch. Join us?"

"Had it," Kelly said. "Sorry to spoil your plans, but I'm afraid you're not going to get lunch. Something's come up."

"Sabrina?" Jill asked worriedly, looking at the two racquets Kelly was carrying, and recognizing one as Sabrina's.

"It concerns Sabrina, but she's all right," Kelly said. "It's a private matter, Jill."

"Oh." Jill threw an apologetic smile at the tennis pro. "Sorry, Bud. Another time, I guess."

He looked disappointed, but he accepted it stoically. "Sure, sweets. I'll catch your act tomorrow, maybe."

As he moved on toward the hotel, Jill asked, "What's up?"

"Sabrina still thinks somebody's brainwashed Wycin-ski or something. Remember that peanut eater we saw on the road, relinquishing the Caddy to the man with the hook nose?"

"Uh-huh. Sabrina said he wasn't her type."

"She's changed her mind. He picked up our luncheon check, moved in on us, and she invited herself up to his room."

"Sabrina?" Jill said in disbelief.

"She thinks he has something to do with whatever's wrong with Wycinski. She also thinks he deliberately latched on to her to keep her away from Wycinski. She's going to shake him. She wants you outside his room to follow him when he comes out."

"Why me?" Jill asked. "You've *had* your lunch."

"He knows I'm a friend of Sabrina's. If he spotted me right after she left him in the lurch, he'd know it was a setup. He's never met you."

"All right," Jill said resignedly. "What's the room number?"

"Two-forty-seven. And the name is Paul Kuznicki."

"Okay. Where are you going?"

"Back to the suite. Sabrina wants me to meet her there."

Jill handed over her racquet. "Then you may as well take this along with you. I always hate to carry a tennis racquet on a tailing assignment. Makes you stand out too much."

The two girls walked back into the hotel together, and as far as the elevators. There they split, Kelly continuing on to the suite and Jill taking an elevator to the second floor.

Kelly was in the suite just long enough to change out of her tennis outfit into a white pantsuit when Sabrina came in.

"Hi," Sabrina said. "You look nice in that. Where's Jill?"

"Waiting for the peanut eater to come out of room two-forty-seven, like you asked. How'd you get out?"

"Carefully. Listen, I thought of something. If our peanut-eating friend is part of the conspiracy against the professor, so is Anton Rabitch. We know they have some kind of relationship, because we saw them switch places in that Cadillac."

Kelly said, "Sabrina, you don't know that there's a conspiracy. You're only guessing."

"I know that *something* has happened to the professor. I know Paul Kuznicki is a phony, and Rabitch must be too. Kelly, have you ever wondered why that Caddy was parked out there with one man in it, and then they changed drivers?"

"Not really," Kelly said. "I was trying to enjoy my vacation."

"I have a theory. Want to hear it?"

"Do I have a choice?"

"No. Suppose they wanted to get someone close to Professor Wycinski in order to do something horrible to him. With all the security around him, that would be a problem, wouldn't it?"

"I suppose."

"Who would suspect Anton Rabitch, head of the Polish Freedom Fighters in Exile—which seems to be stationed in London—and who was invited here by the professor?"

"Nobody. With good cause. Why would Rabitch want to hurt the foremost champion of his cause?"

"He wouldn't. But I don't think that hook-nosed man is Anton Rabitch."

"Aw, come on!" Kelly said, staring at her. "You're letting yourself come unhinged."

"Consider this, Kelly. I overheard the conversation when a couple of FBI men brought Rabitch out on the porch next door and introduced him to Wycinski. The professor *had never before met him*. The security guards cleared him because Anton Rabitch was expected, and a man showed up in his car, carrying his passport."

After thinking this over, Kelly said triumphantly, "Passports have pictures in them. They would have noticed if he looked different than his photograph."

"Oh, Kelly," Sabrina said with a pained expression on her face.

After thinking again, Kelly said a trifle sheepishly, "Fake passports are kind of easy to get, I guess. But it's still all presumption."

"That Caddy parked out at the edge of town isn't. Just suppose they waylaid the *real* Anton Rabitch on the way here, and dumped his body off one of those steep drops? Naturally the peanut eater and his wide buddy wouldn't *walk* way out there to do it. They'd drive, in a car—say, that Ford we saw making a U-turn to park behind the Caddy. They wouldn't drive the Caddy into town, because they didn't want it seen until the fake Anton Rabitch arrived in it. So the peanut eater waited in it out at the edge of town while his buddy drove in to pick up the imposter."

Kelly thought this over for a long time before saying, uncertainly, "That's still all speculation, Sabrina."

"But it fits together," Sabrina said impatiently. "Can you think of any other possible explanation for the switch of drivers in the Cadillac?"

"Maybe if I thought about it long enough. Okay, for the sake of argument let's assume you're right. What can we do about it?"

"One thing is find Wycinski's son. He should have arrived by now. I want you to find him, talk to him, tell him what's happened."

In a frustrated voice Kelly argued, "Sabrina, I don't know what's happened. Neither do you."

"But I do know everything Peter Wycinski does, everything he says publicly—to the Assistant Secretary, to the press. It's all very important. It can have even international impact. If he's being threatened . . ."

When she let it trail off, Kelly said, "You can't be sure he's being threatened."

"I'm sure about our friend in room two-forty-seven. He lied about knowing who Wycinski was, or that he knew he was here. And the look on the professor's face when he came downstairs: it wasn't embarrassment because I waved to him. *He was frightened.*" She nodded in the direction of the suite next door. "I'm going to find out why."

"You'll never get past those security people. Or Rabitch," Kelly said.

"Just find Wycinski's son," Sabrina said. "Bring him back here. If I'm gone, wait for me."

Sighing, Kelly picked up her purse and headed for the main door to the suite. Sabrina stepped into her bedroom to change out of her tennis outfit. She too put on a pantsuit, but hers was a checked beige.

After changing, she opened the drapes in the front room and the sliding door and stepped out on the porch. She glanced left, up at the front window of room 247, and saw that the drapes were closed. Going over to the right-hand railing and peering across at the suite next door, she saw that the sliding door was closed and the drapes inside were drawn across it.

Looking around in all directions and seeing no one but a couple of fishermen at the lake's edge with their backs to her, she climbed over the railing, crossed to the next porch and climbed that railing too. She gently tapped on the glass door.

After a moment, the drapes parted just far enough for the hook-nosed Anton Rabitch—if it was Anton Rabitch—to peer out. He looked startled when he saw her, but not angry. Opening the drapes the rest of the way, he slid open the door just far enough for him to pass through it. Through the glass, Sabrina could see Professor Wycinski seated at a table with his back to them, working over some papers. No one else was in evidence.

Sliding the door closed behind him, the man regarded Sabrina without animosity, but with an air of resignation. "Yes, Miss Duncan?"

"Same old thing," Sabrina said. "I want to talk with the professor."

"He's busy making some changes in his speech. I spoke to him about you. He acknowledged a moment of indiscretion in your room. But I explained to you how he is. He would prefer to forget it."

"I want to hear *him* say that," Sabrina insisted stubbornly.

He surprised her by saying, as if reconciled to it, "All right. I'll interrupt him long enough to let him

speak to you for a moment. But please don't hold him long. He really has no time to waste."

"I won't keep him," she promised. "But may I see him alone?"

"If he agrees to it," the hook-nosed man told her.

Sliding the door partway open again, he went inside. She could see him speaking briefly to the professor. The bearded man swung around in his chair to look at her, then got to his feet heavily and came out on the porch. He slid the glass door closed behind him. The hook-nosed man watched them through the glass, but from deep within the room, from where he couldn't possibly hear them.

Regarding Sabrina soberly, the professor said in his mellifluous voice, "I am sorry for the embarrassment I caused you, pretty one. I did not return your wave in the lobby because it is not seemly for Peter Wycinski to appear to be on intimate terms with such an attractive young lady. However, that doesn't mean I will ever forget the pleasant moments spent in your room."

Sabrina got the peculiar impression he was reciting from memory. She got the further peculiar impression that he seemed to think much more had happened in her room than actually had. She wondered if he could have been given some drug that destroyed his memory and made him a slave to his captors. She remembered reading of how Hungarian Cardinal Mindszenty had stood glassy-eyed before a Communist court nearly thirty years previously, drugged into submission. Perhaps something similar had happened to the professor.

"Do you feel all right?" Sabrina asked.

"Of course," the professor said. "I am in the best of health."

Examining him, she decided that if he were drugged, it was a much more subtle drug than the one used on Cardinal Mindszenty. There was nothing glassy-eyed about Wycinski.

"Are you in any kind of trouble?" she persisted.

He shook his head. "None."

"Maybe you're in some kind of trouble you don't

know about," she said. "Are you sure that man in there is actually Anton Rabitch?"

He looked startled. "Why do you ask that?"

"Because I think he's an imposter. You never saw him before this visit, did you?"

His eyes narrowed. "No. He lives in London."

"I think you ought to wire London for a description of Rabitch."

He regarded her broodingly. "Why do you think he's an imposter. Do you have some actual information?"

She shook her head. "Just suspicion. Do you know a man named Paul Kuznicki?"

Something that flashed in his eyes suggested that the name was familiar, but he said, "No."

"He has that room right there," Sabrina said, pointing. "The one on second, with the closed drapes. He and a wide, heavyset man with him were watching you. Through binoculars this morning."

Wycinski glanced at the indicated window, then back at her. "Interesting, but many people watch me, Sabrina. They may simply be reporters."

"No," she said. "They're associates of the man calling himself Anton Rabitch. That's why I think *he's* an imposter. Because they're enemies of yours. Since they're so chummy with your hook-nosed friend, he must be an enemy too."

"You have a wild imagination, young lady," he said. He turned to slide open the glass door again, then glanced back at her. "I'm afraid this is all the time I can spare. It was pleasant to see you again, but . . ." He let the words trail off.

"I know," Sabrina said ruefully. "It's bad for your image. I won't bother you again, professor."

Nodding, he started to step inside.

"One last thing," she said. "What about your son?"

Pausing, he looked over his shoulder. "What about him?"

"I'm not to meet him after all?"

"Meet him?"

"When he arrives here. Or perhaps he has already."

He shook his head. "He phoned that he's delayed.

In any event, he has a young lady, so would not be interested."

He went the rest of the way indoors, closed the sliding door and drew the drapes. Sabrina stared at the blank drapes in confusion. This time there was no doubt about it; he had forgotten that it had been his idea to introduce Sabrina to his son.

Then another thought struck her. Jon Wycinski had been "delayed." Perhaps that was a euphemism for "kidnapped." That would explain everything: the professor's seeming fright when she waved at him in the lobby, his withdrawn air now. If they were holding his son's life over his head, they were in a position to force him to do anything they desired.

She climbed back over two railings and re-entered her suite. Kelly came in the door from the hall as Sabrina came in from the porch.

"He hasn't checked in yet," Kelly said.

"I know," Sabrina told her. "I just talked to Professor Wycinski. Jon's been delayed."

"You actually got to see the professor?" Kelly asked in surprise.

"Uh-huh. And he put me in my proper place. Something's terribly wrong with him, Kelly. I can't put my finger on just what, but he just isn't the same man I drank slivovitz with. Either his memory's slipping, or he's pretending it is, to avoid answering questions. It occurred to me that the reason Jon hasn't shown up is that they've kidnapped him, and are forcing the professor to act as he is on threat of killing his son."

Kelly stared at her for a long time before asking, "Where do you get these sensational theories? You on something?"

"They just come to me. I wonder how Jill's doing?"

Next door, Sabrina's visit had created considerable havoc. When the pseudo-professor came back inside and closed the drapes, he collapsed into an easy chair and stared at the hook-nosed man.

"What is it?" Veechek Nowak asked sharply. "She tumble to you?"

The big man shook his head. "She swallowed me, all right. But she warned me against you. She doesn't think you're really Anton Rabitch."

"My god! What gave her that insight?"

"I don't know. Somehow she knows you're tied in with Paul Kuznicki. She's figured out that Paul is an enemy of mine—I mean of the professor—and figures if you're in conspiracy with Paul, you must be an enemy too."

The hook-nosed man began pacing back and forth. "That blunderer Paul!" he raged. "I gave him the assignment of keeping her occupied all afternoon. He not only let her shake him within a half-hour, somehow he let her figure out what he was up to."

"What are we going to do?" Josef asked.

"Only one thing we can do," the fake Anton Rabitch snapped at him. "We'll have to kill her."

The big man blinked. "Now? You want me to go over there now?"

"Good god, no!" the hook-nosed man said. "Haller is due back any minute. All we need is to have Professor Wycinski caught in the act of strangling a young woman. We'll let Paul make amends by taking care of Miss Duncan."

Nine

After locating room 247, Jill had retreated around the corner where the nearest elevators were, and had listened, out of sight, for the sound of the door to 247 opening and closing. There was no danger of her missing anyone who came out of the room,

because the corner she was concealed behind had to be rounded to reach both the elevators and the stairs.

When she finally heard the door open and close, she went over and punched the elevator Down button. A moment later Paul Kuznicki hurried around the corner. He was too furious to notice the girl waiting for an elevator. He took the stairs downward two at a time.

As soon as he was out of sight, Jill ran over and went down the stairs just as rapidly. By the time she reached the bottom, Kuznicki was going out a back door. He was moving along the winding, fern-lined path toward the chalets along the lakefront when she got to the back door.

She followed discreetly, taking advantage of natural cover. Her caution was unnecessary, because he never once looked back. He strode directly to a chalet where all the drapes were drawn, and went in, slamming the door behind him.

"Temper, temper," Jill said to herself.

Approaching the chalet cautiously, she noted that instead of a number on the door, there was the letter D. Apparently the chalets were lettered instead of numbered.

She started to circle the building, checking each window to see if she could find one where the drapes were cracked enough for her to peer in. There were none like that at the front or on the right side, but as soon as she rounded the corner on the lake side, she found one. Putting her eyes to the slit, she had to peer in for some time, letting her vision gradually adjust to the dim interior, before she could make out anything.

Eventually she saw that she was looking into a bedroom. A man was lying on the bed. He was a slim, rather good-looking man in his thirties, fully dressed and lying on his back. He was so still that Jill wondered if he were dead.

Three men came into the room. First was Paul Kuznicki, followed by a short, heavyish man with a happy expression. Last was a grossly fat man.

Kuznicki started toward the window, with the obvious intention of opening the drapes.

"No!" the fat man said sharply. "Could look in, somebody."

Although his voice was muffled by the glass, Jill heard him distinctly. He had a strong Slavic accent.

Jill had begun to draw back as Kuznicki approached the window, but now she put her eye to the crack again. Kuznicki had returned to the door and switched on the overhead light. Then he went over to the bed, rolled back one eyelid of the unconscious man and peered into his eye.

"He's still good until morning," he said. "Let's check the other one."

The light went out again. Jill continued along the back of the building, past the central room, to what she figured was a second bedroom. Windows were at both the rear and the side into that room, but both drapes were tightly closed. She could hear voices inside, however. She put her ear to the glass.

The voice with the Balkan accent said, "He too will sleep through the night, no?"

Paul Kuznicki's voice said, "He's got a lot more body weight than the other one. I'm not sure how long the shot will hold him, and I'm afraid to give him another. It might kill him."

"We not want that, so soon," the accented voice said. "Get rope, and tie and gag him, Mateusz."

A phone in the center room rang. Jill ran back to the rear window of it and pressed her ear to the glass.

She heard the accented voice say, "Bartkowiak here." After a pause, he said, "Just a minute, Veech. For you, Kuznicki."

Paul Kuznicki's voice said, "Yeah, Veech?"

There was a long silence before Kuznicki retorted angrily, "Don't come down on me. She obviously knew it was a phony setup before I ever picked her up. From what you say, she had you made all along. So you blew it, not me."

Again there was silence. Then Kuznicki said more calmly, "That's gonna cost you an added fee."

After another pause, he said, "Okay, Veech. This afternoon. See you."

Apparently he hung up, because he spoke in a different tone. "We got a little job to do, Karl. Let's get over to our room."

Jill waited where she was until she heard the front door of the chalet open and close again. Then she cautiously peeked around the corner. Kuznicki and the plump man were heading for the hotel. She waited until they disappeared inside before heading for it too.

She found both Kelly and Sabrina in the suite, both now changed from their tennis outfits into pantsuits.

"I followed the peanut eater from two-forty-seven," Jill reported. "He found some friends. Chalet D down on the lakefront. They're holding a couple of people there. Drugged."

Sabrina's eyes sparkled. "I knew chicanery was going on. Could you see who it was?"

"In one room. Slim, kind of good-looking man in his thirties. Dressed in a suit and tie. I couldn't see in the other room, but I overheard them talking. I gathered from the conversation that the second prisoner was rather big."

"Jon Wycinski, I'll bet," Sabrina said excitedly. "We've got to get into that chalet."

"Know what I think we should do before we go any further?" Kelly asked.

The other two girls looked at her.

"Phone Charlie," Kelly said.

"We're on vacation," Jill objected.

"We're up to our ears in some kind of conspiracy," Kelly said. "And it may have international repercussions. I think we could use Charlie's advice."

"We could at least use his contacts," Sabrina said thoughtfully. "He could probably pick up the phone and get us a description of Anton Rabitch as fast as you could say cable call."

"So what are we waiting for?" Kelly asked.

Ten

Sabrina was reaching for the phone when Jill had a thought. She said, "Hold it a minute. I heard some names while I was eavesdropping. But only a couple of first names and one last one. Maybe we ought to find out their full names before we call Charlie, so he can check them out."

"What are the names?" Kelly asked.

"A fat man who answered the phone when it rang gave his name as Bartkowiak. I think he's the big boss of whatever's going on. I don't know what the phone call was about, but he called the person who was phoning Veech. The peanut eater's roommate is a squat, heavyish man with a Santa Claus expression named Karl. No last name was mentioned. Then, once, the fat man called somebody Mat-tuse, but I didn't see him."

Sabrina asked, "You think the chalet is registered in Bartkowiak's name?"

"He seemed to be the boss," Jill said.

Sabrina picked up the phone. "That chalet was D?" she asked Jill.

Jill nodded.

Into the phone Sabrina said, "Chalet D, please."

After a couple of rings a deep voice said, "Bartkowiak here."

"This is registration, Mr. Bartkowiak," Sabrina said. "Somehow we've mislaid your registration card. I hate to bother you, but would you mind giving me the information again?"

"Speak."

"Your first name, Mr. Bartkowiak?"

"Walther. W-A-L-T-H-E-R."

"And how many occupants in the chalet?"

"Two."

"The other person's name?"

"Why you need that?" Bartkowiak asked suspiciously. "I not put that on the card you lost when I register."

"Oh, it isn't really necessary," Sabrina said smoothly. "Just one more question, Mr. Bartkowiak. How long are you planning to be our guest?"

"We check out in the morning."

"Thank you, sir," Sabrina said sweetly, and hung up.

"You should have been a con artist," Kelly commented.

Jill said, "She *is* a con artist."

Making a face at both of them, Sabrina said, "One down. It's Walther Bartkowiak, with an H in it. Only one other person's registered in the chalet, but he got a little huffy about naming him. Presumably the man called Mat-tuse. They didn't register the prisoners. Think we should tip off the hotel that they've sneaked in extra guests?"

"I think we should work on the other names," Kelly said.

Picking up the phone again, Sabrina called the registration desk. When a male voice answered she said, "Paul Kuznicki is in room two-forty-seven, isn't he?"

"Just a moment, please."

There was a short wait, then the male voice said, "Yes, ma'am. You wish me to ring the room?"

"No. Actually my problem is that I have a dinner date with his roommate, I'm going to have to introduce him to some people, and I'm in the embarrassing position of having forgotten his last name. His first name is Karl."

"Hold on a minute," the desk clerk replied. Then, after another short wait, he said, "Janoski, madam. J-A-N-O-S-K-I. Karl Janoski."

Sabrina considered asking how Paul Kuznicki spelled his last name, but decided that might arouse suspicion.

Instead she merely said, "Thank you," and hung up.

"Two down," she said. "The peanut eater's buddy is Karl Janoski."

"Veech is going to be a little tougher," Kelly said. "We don't know whether that's a first name, last name, or maybe just a nickname. Plus we don't know his room number, or even if he's registered at the hotel."

"You might go charm the desk clerk," Sabrina suggested. "Maybe you could dig out of him if any guests are called Veech."

"All right," Kelly agreed, heading for the door.

Jill said, "While she's doing that, I'm going to grab a shower to cool off from my tennis game, change clothes and have some lunch sent up. I haven't had any, you know."

"I'll phone down for you," Sabrina said. "What do you want?"

Jill told her to order a chef's salad and a glass of milk.

Room service had delivered the lunch by the time Jill returned to the living room dressed in a light green sweater and matching skirt. Jill was eating her lunch when Kelly came back in.

"Struck out," Kelly announced. "He was cooperative enough. Matter of fact, I may have a problem when he gets off at eight. He searched the records, but couldn't find anybody with either the first or last name of Veech."

"Guess we've got all the information we're going to get. May as well phone Charlie," Sabrina said.

Lifting the phone, she gave the switchboard operator an area 213 number. After three rings a familiar voice said, "Hello."

"Sabrina, Charlie. We have a little problem."

"Run out of money, angel?"

"No, no, everything's fine. The suite is lovely, Charlie. We appreciate that. The problem has to do with Peter Wycinski."

"You two are eloping?"

"Be serious Charlie. He's in some kind of trouble. We don't know exactly what, but we suspect his son's

been kidnapped, and as ransom the professor is being forced to obey orders. Maybe to make some statement in his speech tonight that will help the regime in Poland. That's only a guess, but we are sure he's in trouble."

"You girls are supposed to be on vacation, Sabrina."

"Charlie . . ." she said reproachfully.

"I know, he's your idol. Okay, you know who's bringing this pressure?"

"We have some names. The apparent boss of the operation is a man named Walther Bartkowiak. Walther with an H."

"A fat man?" Charlie asked quickly.

"Yes. Jill's the only one who's seen him, but she says he's fat."

"Attaché at the Polish consulate in LA," Charlie said. "Formerly a member of his country's secret police. Kind of a troubleshooter for the Polish Communist Party. I know him well, because we clashed once over another case. If you look closely, you'll see a light scar over his left eye."

"You put it there, Charlie?"

"Uh-huh. It was an accident. I was trying to cut off his head. What else?"

"There's a man named Paul Kuznicki, and one named Karl Janoski."

"Neither rings a bell," Charlie said. "Can you spell those names?"

"I'd have to guess at Kuznicki, but Janoski is J-A-N-O-S-K-I. Both are about forty. Paul Kuznicki is tall and handsome, Karl Janoski short and wide, and Jill says he has a Santa Claus expression."

"What's a Santa Claus expression?"

Holding the phone out to Jill, who was just finishing her salad, Sabrina said, "Charlie wants to know what's a Santa Claus expression."

Leaning forward to speak into the phone without taking it from Sabrina's hand, Jill said, "Sort of jolly, Charlie, like he's getting ready to say, 'Ho, ho, ho!'" Only I don't think he's as jolly as he looks."

Putting the phone back to her ear, Sabrina asked, "Get that?"

"Yes. I'll see what I can turn on them. Anybody else?"

"A couple of partial names. Mat-tuse and Veech."

"That's probably Mateusz," Charlie said. "M-A-T-E-U-S-Z. That's Polish for Matthew. Veech is short for Veechek, which is Polish for Vincent."

"How do you know all this?" Sabrina asked curiously.

"My former wife was Polish, angel."

"On. One other thing, Charlie. There is a man with Professor Wycinski named Anton Rabitch, from London. He's the head of a group called Polish Freedom Fighters in Exile. Ever hear of him?"

"The name rings a vague bell. Probably saw it in the news. I know something about the Polish Freedom Fighters in Exile. What about him?"

"Apparently he's never been to this country before, and the professor had never previously met him. I think he's an imposter. I think they waylaid the real Anton Rabitch en route here, and substituted this man."

"Interesting," Charlie said. "On what do you base that opinion?"

"On a process of deduction that's a little too complicated to explain over the phone."

"Okay, what's he look like?"

"Lean, wiry, about thirty-five, dark hair and a nose with a pronounced hook."

"I'll give London a ring and find out what Rabitch looks like," Charlie said as casually as he might have mentioned phoning across the street. "I'll get back to you as soon as possible."

"Good. If none of us are in the room, have us paged."

"Will do. Have I got it all now?"

"I think so. Just a minute." Looking at the other two girls, she asked, "Can you think of anything else?"

Kelly said, "We ought to be at that banquet tonight. Ask him if he can use his influences to get us seats."

"I heard that," Charlie said. "It's doubtful. According to *News World* you have to belong to the Polish-American Freedom League, the Polish Freedom Fighters in Exile, or work for the State Department; there's only two hundred seats in the banquet room, and they're all filled. Wycinski is expected to make a quite important announcement, you know. However, I'll check it out and let you know."

"All right, Charlie," Sabrina said. "Goodbye."

"Goodbye, angel. While you're waiting for me to call back, don't forget you're all on vacation. Try to enjoy."

"We will," Sabrina told him, and hung up.

Jill, who had finished her salad and was now sipping her milk, asked, "What now?"

"Next, at least one of us ought to get a look inside that chalet," Sabrina said.

"That sounds like me," Jill said. "Since I know where it is."

"I'll back you up," Kelly offered.

"And I'll stay here waiting for Charlie's call-back," Sabrina said.

"You always take the tough jobs," Jill laughed. Finishing her milk, she set down her glass and got to her feet. "I'm ready, Kelly, if you are."

Kelly followed Jill from the room. Sabrina, having nothing else to do, sat down to write a letter to her father on hotel stationery.

She had finished the letter and started addressing the envelope. She had written "*Col. Richard Blaylock, U.S.A. Ret.*" when there was a knock at the door. Setting down her pen, she went to answer it.

She tried to close the door again when she saw who it was, but Paul Kuznicki roughly pushed his way in. The heavyset Karl Janoski came in behind him and shut the door. Janoski was carrying what looked like a large laundry bag.

"You didn't stay to taste the champagne," Kuznicki growled, giving her a sharp slap across the face.

Sabrina reeled backward. Kuznicki bore in at her, aiming a backhand slap. Ducking under it, she seized

his wrist, spun her back to him and swiveled her hip into him, and flipped him over her shoulder to land on his back with a thump that whooshed the air out of him.

A karate chop was smashed alongside her neck from behind, and she blacked out.

Eleven

As Jill and Kelly walked along the hall toward the lobby, they passed a maid pushing a cleaning cart. When Jill halted to stare at her, Kelly halted too. She gave Jill an inquiring look.

"Just had an idea," Jill said.

The cleaning maid stopped the cart next to a nearby door. As she raised her hand to knock, Jill strode over to her.

"Where is the housekeeping department?" she asked.

With her fist suspended in air, the woman said, "Across the lobby and along the hall to where it says 'Employees Only,' ma'am."

"Thank you," Jill said.

She and Kelly proceeded on to the indicated door and pushed through it into a continuation of the hall. They passed a glass-paned door lettered "Chief Housekeeper," through with they could see a large woman in a white uniform seated at a desk. Beyond the door, on both sides of the corridor, were numerous other doors with such labels on them as BROOMS, CLEANING SUPPLIES, APPLIANCES AND CARTS, LINENS and UNIFORMS. At the far end of the hall was a door labeled LAUNDRY.

The woman in the office glanced up as they passed, then rose from her chair and came over to look out into the corridor.

"Yes, ladies?" she called after Jill and Kelly.

Turning around, Jill said briefly, "Inventory."

She walked over to the door labeled LINENS, opened it and began counting sheets. Kelly moved in next to her to help count. After gazing at the two girls doubtfully for a moment, the large woman shrugged and returned to her office.

As soon as the office door closed behind her, Jill shut the linen closet door.

"Mind telling me what we're doing?" Kelly asked.

"Stealing," Jill said.

She led the way to the door lettered UNIFORMS. The cleaning maids' uniforms were merely light green smocks that fitted over regular clothing. Jill picked out one in her size, glanced in the direction of the office and put it on. Opening a closet labeled TOWELS, she selected a face towel, pushed up her abundant ash-blond hair and tied the towel around her head.

Examining her critically, Kelly said, "Sorry, kid. Even though that smock isn't much of a fit, and with that towel around your head, you look more like a photographer's model than a cleaning maid."

"Thank you, ma'am," Jill said, curtseying.

She then went over to the door lettered APPLIANCES AND CARTS, opened it and disappeared into the room. When she emerged, she was pushing a cleaning cart. She loaded it with cleaning supplies and linens from those respective closets. All this time Kelly watched with bemusement, periodically glancing worriedly toward the door of the office. The chief housekeeper never reappeared, however.

When Jill was fully equipped, she pushed the cart along the corridor to a point just short of the office door, then gave it a shove that sent it rolling past the door. It couldn't be seen by the woman inside because it was not as high as the window. Jill dropped to all fours and crawled beneath the window.

Kelly waited until Jill had pushed the cart out of sight through the door labeled "Employees Only," then followed.

The chief housekeeper glanced up as she passed.

Apparently she assumed Jill had preceded Kelly and she hadn't noticed her go by, because she didn't come to the office door to check why only one of the inventory crew was leaving.

Jill was waiting in the corridor just beyond the door. When Kelly joined her, Jill said, "Will you get me some Scotch Tape from that drugstore across the lobby?"

"Sure," Kelly said. "What are we going to do with Scotch Tape?"

"I'm going to stick a piece to my thumb."

"Ask a silly question and you get a silly answer," Kelly said philosophically. "I'll be right back."

In about five minutes she returned with a roll of Scotch Tape. She watched with interest as Jill stripped off about three inches of tape and stuck its two ends, curled inward, to the inside of her left thumb. This left most of its length sticky side out.

As Jill handed back the tape, Kelly said, "I assume all will become clear eventually."

"It's really a quite simple plot," Jill assured her.

Jill pushed the cart along the corridor. Kelly let her get some distance ahead before following, as it would have looked odd for a cleaning maid and a guest to be walking side by side in chumminess.

Jill pushed the cart out the back door and along the winding, fern-lined path leading to the chalets. When Jill stopped at one of the chalets and knocked on the door, Kelly continued on by and seated herself on a concrete bench at the edge of the path a few yards beyond. From the bench she could get a view of the chalet's front entrance.

Kelly saw the door open, and an enormously fat man with multiple chins gave Jill an inquiring look.

"I'm here to clean your suite, sir," Jill said, starting inside and momentarily gripping the edge of the door as she did.

Kelly understood the purpose of the Scotch Tape then. Jill had gripped the door edge just where the lock's bolt was. Kelly knew she had pushed the bolt open and had pressed the tape across it to keep it open.

The fat man shifted his bulk to block Jill's way. "Was cleaned this morning, the whole cabin," he said.

"Did anybody clean it this afternoon?" Jill asked.

"This afternoon, is not reason to clean again," the huge man said with exasperation.

"Right," Jill agreed, smiling at him. "I'll get it first thing in the morning."

Stepping back, she turned around and pushed the cart in the direction of Kelly. After staring after her for a moment, the fat man closed the door.

Jill went right past Kelly and around behind the next chalet, where she was out of sight of Chalet D. Halting the cart, she stripped off the smock, removed the towel from about her head and dropped both on the cart. Leaving the cart there, she headed back toward the hotel. Kelly let her get to the hotel's back door before following.

In the angels' suite the unconscious Sabrina had been stuffed into the laundry bag. As the heavyset Karl tightened the drawstrings, Kuznicki painfully crossed to the sliding door, favoring his back, and parted the drapes enough to see if the way was clear to carry the bag over to the chalet unobserved.

A cleaning maid, he saw from Sabrina's suite, was just knocking on the door of the chalet. The knock was answered by Walther Bartkowiak. Kuznicki watched as the woman tried to push inside. The fat man moved in front of her to block her way, and there was a short colloquy. It ended with the cleaning maid moving on with the cart and Bartkowiak closing the door. The woman pushed the cart around on the far side of the next chalet.

Now Kuznicki watched with astonishment as she stripped off her smock to disclose a smart skirt-and-sweater outfit beneath it, dropped the smock on the cleaning cart and unfastened the towel around her head to release a cascade of curling ash-blond hair. Leaving the cart there, she headed for the hotel's back door.

Turning around, Kuznicki limped over to the phone and called Chalet D.

"What's the matter?" Karl asked as the phone was ringing.

"Listen, and you'll hear," Kuznicki said curtly.

Walther Bartkowiak answered the phone.

Kuznicki said, "We're over in the girl's suite, where we can see your front door."

"Under control, everything?" the fat man asked.

"In the bag. But that cleaning maid who just tried to get in the chalet."

"Yes?"

"She wasn't a cleaning maid. She pushed her cart around beyond the next chalet and took off her uniform. She's a stylish young woman in about a two-hundred-dollar outfit."

After a period of silence, Bartkowiak said, "Wait."

About a half-minute passed before he returned to the phone to say, "Some kind clear, sticky tape. Over the door bolt it is stuck to leave always open. You think police?"

"More likely a reporter. Doesn't really matter. *Somebody* is suspicious. But they can't know for sure, or cops would be pounding on the door. What do we do now?"

"First, the merchandise we move," the fat man said instantly. "Your new merchandise, too, obviously not here can be brought. I send Mateusz fast to find new place. Meantime, your merchandise, put in car and wait."

"Okay. What about the fake cleaning maid?"

"Her description?"

"A slim, beautiful ash blonde, with long hair to her shoulders. Wearing a light green skirt and sweater about the same shade as the smock she had over them."

"It will be of interest to meet her," Bartkowiak said. "I leave the sticky tape on door and wait for her return."

"Good," Kuznicki said approvingly. "I'll check back after we get our merchandise settled."

Hanging up, he went back over to the sliding door to

peer out again. He had not seen Kelly when he first looked out, because bushes obstructed the view of the bench she had been seated on. And she had entered the hotel while he was on the phone. No one was in sight.

Turning to Karl, he said, "Plans are changed. We'll carry her over to the Ford on the parking lot instead of to the chalet." He opened the drapes, then the sliding door.

Heaving the laundry bag over his shoulder, Karl went out on the porch. Kuznicki followed, reached back in to close the drapes, and drew the sliding door shut. Placing one hand on the porch railing, he vaulted over it to the ground, then accepted the bag from his plump partner.

Karl climbed the railing too, then walked behind Kuznicki, partially supporting the contents of the bag.

Halfway to the parking lot Kuznicki came to a halt. "You'll have to take her by yourself," he said. "My back is killing me. I think I slipped a disk."

Karl silently grabbed the neck of the laundry bag and slung it over his shoulder. They continued on, Kuznicki having difficulty keeping up, even without any burden.

Just inside the back door of the hotel Kelly found Jill waiting. "You were beautiful," she said admiringly. "When do we go in there to look around?"

"When they leave the place. They must emerge for fresh air occasionally. Maybe they'll take a walk down to the lake."

"We're going to watch from here?" Kelly asked, peering through the glass door in the direction of the chalet. "It may be hours."

"We can see just as well from our suite," Jill said.

They returned to the suite. Sabrina was not in the front room.

"Bree!" Kelly called.

When there was no answer, Jill went through one bedroom to glance into the bathroom; Kelly checked the other bathroom. As they returned to the front room, both shook their heads.

Spotting the letter Sabrina had been finishing on the writing table, Kelly went over to examine it.

"She wrote a letter to her father," she said. Kelly shuffled through the sheets without reading them, just to make sure they all were part of the letter. "All letter," she said. "Funny she didn't leave a note for us."

Moving over next to her, Jill looked down. "She started to address the envelope, but didn't finish. Just her father's name."

The two girls looked at each other, beginning to worry. "Think someone or something swooped her up?" Jill asked.

Kelly started to frown, then her face cleared. "Probably ducked in next door again to talk to the professor."

She went over to open the drapes and the sliding glass door and stepped out on the porch. Jill followed and both gazed over at the adjoining porch. The sliding door of that suite was closed, and the drapes were drawn.

"If she's over there, they must want privacy," Jill said.

The phone rang, and both girls went back inside.

Twelve

Kelly reached the phone first. Jill returned to the glass door to look across at the chalet.

"Hello?" Kelly said.

The familiar voice of Charlie Townsend said, "Hi, angel."

"Hi, Charlie," Kelly responded with pleasure.

That brought Jill over from the door. She bent her head next to Kelly's in order to hear too.

"Sabrina there?" Charlie asked.

"No," Kelly said. "We think she's next door, talking to the professor."

"Okay, I'll give it to you. I have some of the information Sabrina asked for."

"Go ahead," Kelly said.

"Paul Kuznicki and Karl Janoski are a pair of freelance hit men, originally out of Detroit, but currently based in San Francisco. They definitely aren't Communists, so if they're involved in this, it's strictly for pay."

"Got it," Kelly said.

"Now for those partial names. There is a man named Mateusz Krzal who works in some minor capacity for the Polish consulate in Los Angeles. Thin, dark, about forty."

Jill put her lips close to the phone and said, "Nobody's seen him, Charlie. I just overheard the name."

"You on an extension, Jill?" Charlie asked.

Kelly said, "No, she just butted in."

"Oh. Well, if your Mateusz is the same man, he's a lightweight insofar as intrigue is concerned, but he's a master in his own field."

"What's that?" Kelly inquired.

"He's a rather famous makeup artist. Used to be with the Warsaw Players, and was lured to Hollywood by a studio offer. The Polish government wouldn't let him come here on a visitor's visa, though. Instead they sent him over as a clerk for the LA consulate, presumably so they could keep a tight leash on him. The red tape of getting him to work at the studio eventually became too much, and the studio dropped him. So one of the best theatrical makeup men in the world works as a clerk. That's bureaucracy."

"Communist bureaucracy," Kelly said.

"Oh, we have the same kind in Washington," Charlie said. "Read the Hoover Report sometime. I may have a make on that other partial name, too. Veech. But it's kind of a wild guess. An FBI contact in Wash-

ington tells me there is a suspected Communist spy named Veechek Nowak who answers to the description Sabrina gave me of the man who says he's Anton Rabitch. He's an American citizen, but was born in Poland. Came here as a child. The FBI had him under surveillance, but recently lost him. Guess where?"

"Los Angeles?" Kelly hazarded.

"San Francisco, where Kuznicki and Janoski ordinarily hang their hats. As I said, this is a kind of wild guess, because Veechek is not an uncommon first name for Polish men. So don't bank on the man who says he's Rabitch being Veechek Nowak."

"We won't," Kelly said. "Did you get a description of Anton Rabitch?"

"Not yet. I'm expecting a call-back from London at any minute, though. I'll phone again, soon as it comes in. I hope all this is helpful."

"You're always helpful, Charlie," Kelly said. "Were you able to get us seats at the banquet?"

"No," he said regretfully. "And I went pretty high in the State Department. There's a waiting list of VIPs. I have a suggestion, though."

"What?"

"Why don't one or more of you try for a waitress job?"

"Hey, we could do that!" Kelly said, pleased by the suggestion. "Anything else, Charlie?"

"That's it, angels. I'll call back, soon as I hear from London."

Placing her lips close to the phone again, Jill asked curiously, "What are you doing right now, Charlie?"

"Working so hard, as usual, that I'm almost flat on my face, Jill. I'm carrying quite a load on my back."

"About one hundred ten pounds?" Jill guessed.

She was close. The load was one hundred twelve pounds. Charlie was lying facedown, wearing only shorts. The same slim blonde he had pulled into the hot-bath that morning sat astride his back, massaging his shoulder muscles.

Ignoring the question, Charlie said, "I'll get back to you soon as possible, angels," and hung up.

Jill immediately went back to the sliding glass doors to look across at the chalet. Hanging up the phone, Kelly moved over alongside her. They saw no activity at the chalet and the drapes were still drawn.

"What time is it?" Kelly asked.

Looking at her watch, Jill said, "Ten after two. When is the banquet?"

"Seven P.M., I think. Gives us less than five hours to figure out what's happening."

"Why don't you go check out the waitress possibility while I keep an eye on the chalet?" Jill suggested.

"Good idea," Kelly said, heading for the door.

At the hotel desk Kelly asked where the personnel office was. She was directed to the mezzanine. There, in the reception room, a desk had a sign on it reading "Information," but the desk was empty. Beyond it was the open door to a private office. Lettered on the door was "Director of Personnel, and inside she could see a pudgy man of about forty seated at a desk.

Going over to the doorway, Kelly said, "Hi. There's no one out here . . ."

Glancing up, the pudgy man said, "Joan's on a coffee br—" He paused abruptly as his visitor's beauty registered on him. "Oh, hi," he said.

Apparently he was highly sensitive to feminine beauty, because Kelly seemed to stun him. Apparently also he was on the way to becoming a dirty old man, because something approaching lechery appeared in his eyes as he rose from his chair, rounded the desk and positioned a chair for her before the desk. By seeming accident the backs of both his hands managed to touch her shoulders as she seated herself. He hurried back around the desk, reseated himself and beamed at her.

"I'm Horatio Mannerly," he offered warmly.

"Kelly Garrett."

"Kelly Garrett," he repeated, savoring the name. "What may I do for you, Miss Garrett?" His tone suggested he hoped she wanted something that would give him a lot of trouble.

"I assume you're hiring extra waitresses for the

banquet tonight. The one for Professor Wycinski, I mean."

He looked puzzled. "Yes, we hired some extra girls."

"Do you need one more?"

He looked even more puzzled. "You want to get some girl a job?"

"Yes, myself."

Now he looked astonished. Running his gaze over her expensive pantsuit, he said, "For yourself? Surely you jest."

Kelly could hardly believe that line. It sounded like something out of a nineteenth-century novel. But then there was something nineteenth-century about Horatio Mannerly. For the first time she noticed that his collar was stiffly starched and looked detachable, and that his hair was parted precisely in the middle. She wondered if outdoors he wore a straw sailor with a cord attached to it.

"I jest not," she assured him.

Cocking an eyebrow, he said, "I—I assumed you were a guest here."

A slight touch of disapproval in his tone made her realize he was a snob who thought waitress work was beneath the class he had assumed her to be in. That irritated her, since in more trying times in the dim past she had once worked as a waitress. But it didn't irritate her enough to put him in his place. She preferred to get out of him what she wanted, and if that involved buttering up to his snobbery, so be it.

Then realizing that part of her initial impact on him had been simply that he assumed from her appearance that she was well off, and probably of some social importance, she deliberately re-created that impression.

Laughing lightly, she said, "I am." She lowered her voice to confidential level. "It's a ploy. I came a considerable distance to hear the professor, only to discover no seats at the banquet were available. I'm willing to work for the privilege of hearing him. You don't even have to pay me."

Instantly his attitude changed. His lightly indulgent smile denoted that he understood the frequently un-

orthodox behavior of the Beautiful People. Kelly was obviously rich and spoiled enough to get away with the outrageous things members of the Jet Set were always doing to indulge their whims.

"Sorry," he said with real regret. "There is not a single vacancy. Matter of fact, we have a couple of girls standing by, in case one or two fail to show."

"I would be *most* grateful . . ." Kelly said seductively. "*Extremely* grateful."

The lechery in his eyes increased a couple of levels as he considered the implications of that. But then he gave his head a regretful shake.

"If it was entirely up to me, I'd put you on as an extra, Miss Garrett. But all the service personnel for the banquet had to be security-cleared by the FBI. And I doubt that there's time to run a brand-new check, because all names were supposed to be in a full week ago. However, if you can get security clearance, I'll be glad to put you on. See Special Agent John Haller, in the same suite as Professor Wycinski."

That blew that idea! Kelly thought. Having Horatio Mannerly wrapped around her finger would get her nowhere with the FBI. She was sure there was no way Special Agent John Haller would go to the trouble of running a special security check just to indulge her whim to hear a speech.

There was no point in wasting more time. Rising to her feet, she said crisply, "Thanks for your time, Mr. Mannerly. If I can get clearance, I'll be back."

She walked out while he was still scrambling to his feet to escort her to the door.

In the suite, Kelly found Jill still watching the chalet.

"Any action?" Kelly asked.

"A little. A man answering the description Charlie gave us of Mateusz Krzal came out and drove off in a panel truck that was parked about there." She pointed to a spot on the parking lot visible to their right. "He was thin, dark, about forty, just as Charlie described Krzal. How'd you make out?"

"Terrible. I wasted some time charming a horny

personnel director until I had him willing to slay dragons for me, only to discover that all service personnel at the baquet have to be security-cleared by the FBI. There's no way even Charlie could get us cleared in the short time between now and the banquet."

Both girls stood looking toward the chalet for a time. Finally Jill said, "Wonder what's keeping Sabrina? She's an awful long time over next door."

"We're not sure that's where she is," Kelly said. "Maybe we'd better check up."

She left the suite and walked along the corridor to the next doorway to the left. Special Agent John Haller answered her knock.

"Yes?" he inquired.

"Is Sabrina Duncan here?" Kelly asked.

He looked slightly pained. "No."

"Have you seen her?" Kelly persisted.

"Not since she returned the professor's cigar lighter," the FBI man said. "Sorry."

Thanking him, Kelly returned to her own suite. "She isn't there and hasn't been there," she announced to Jill. "Where do you suppose she is?"

Jill glanced toward the writing table where the letter and the envelope with an unfinished address lay. "I don't know," she said slowly. "But it isn't like Bree to run off without leaving a note in a situation like this."

The two girls looked at each other. Kelly finally said, "I think something's happened to her."

"Like what?" Jill asked.

"I don't know. But I'd like to know where Paul Kuznicki is right now."

"Speak of the devil!" Jill said.

Kelly looked in the direction Jill was indicating. The handsome Paul Kuznicki was moving along the winding path from the parking lot toward Chalet D. He was moving rather slowly, as though his back were stiff.

He disappeared into the chalet, but reappeared again in less than a minute, making his way along the

path back to the parking lot. As he started to move beyond their range of vision, both girls stepped out onto the porch in order to keep him in view. He got into a Ford sedan in which his heavyset partner, Karl Janoski, already sat behind the wheel. The car backed and drove off the lot.

"Scratch that idea," Jill said. "Sabrina wasn't a passenger."

"Maybe she's just doing what Charlie suggested," Kelly said. "Enjoying."

"Could be," Jill agreed doubtfully. She looked back at the chalet. "In case we're gone when she gets back, maybe we'd better leave her a note about Charlie's call."

"Good idea," Kelly said.

They both went back inside. Jill continued to watch the chalet, while Kelly drafted a note for the third angel.

Thirteen

After loading the laundry bag containing Sabrina in the trunk of the Ford, Paul Kuznicki and Karl Janoski had sat in the car and waited. In a few minutes thin Mateusz Krzal came from the chalet, took the path leading to the parking lot and got into a white panel truck parked there.

As the truck drove off, Kuznicki said with mild complaint, "He might be half the afternoon finding another place. You feel like sitting here waiting?"

"We're only going to dump her eventually anyway," Karl said. "Let's go find our own place."

After considering this, Kuznicki replied, "The fat

man might get sore about us not obeying instructions."

"Screw the fat man," Karl said. "You're the one who brought up the subject."

"He's paying the freight," Kuznicki said in a reasoning tone. "Why get him sore? I'll go tell him we'll handle it by ourselves."

Getting out of the car, he took the winding path leading from the parking lot toward the chalets. Karl watched him enter Chalet D, then come out again after only moments. When Kuznicki climbed back into the car, the plump man gave him an inquiring look.

"He didn't put up any fuss," Kuznicki said. "See, if you use a little tact, you avoid hassle."

Merely grunting, Karl started the engine, backed, and headed for the parking lot exit.

"Head for the mountains," Kuznicki suggested. "See if you can find some side road with no houses on it."

Karl headed west. They explored the first two side roads off the main road, but neither was deserted enough to suit their taste. Then, about eight miles outside the village, both of them spotted a narrow dirt lane leading off to the right just as they went past it. Apparently it was not designated as a road by the highway department, because there had been no crossroad marker preceding it.

"Turn around and try that place we just passed," Kuznicki suggested. "Looked promising."

"I saw it," Karl told him.

They had to go on another mile before they found a place where they could turn around, then Karl nearly missed the lane coming back. Just in time he noticed it, braked and swung left. He braked again to halt the car with its rear end just off the highway on the shoulder in order to read the sign posted at the head of the lane. It read:

SIERRA CLUB HIKERS' ROUTE
HIKERS ONLY
VEHICLES PROHIBITED

"Well, what are you waiting for?" Kuznicki asked.

"The sign says no vehicles."

Kuznicki stared at him. "You've made maybe fifty hits, and you're worried about breaking a traffic rule?"

"I don't know if the car can get through there," Karl said defensively. "It's pretty narrow. What if there's no place to turn around?"

"Then we'll back out. If there wasn't room for vehicles, they wouldn't have posted the sign."

"Maybe they had in mind motorcycles," Karl muttered, but nevertheless he drove on.

The lane was so narrow that undergrowth brushed the car on both sides. The lane was also overgrown with weeds. If hikers used it very frequently, they must have stepped carefully, because no weeds were crushed down.

The lane was winding and climbed steadily. After about a mile Karl began to worry.

"If we never hit a turnaround spot, I'm going to have to back all the way out," he said.

Kuznicki cracked a peanut shell and tossed the kernels into his mouth. "You shouldn't worry," he advised. "It must lead somewhere, or they wouldn't have built it."

Three miles from the main road the lane ended at a small clearing in the center of which was a one-room log cabin. A few yards beyond the cabin a narrow stream trickled past. Karl drove completely around the cabin to park headed back toward the highway. Both men got out.

The cabin had a door, but there were neither glass panes nor shutters in the windows. Peering through one of the windows, they saw there was no one inside. Kuznicki pushed open the door and led the way in.

They found a rough wooden table, two chairs, two wooden bunks without mattresses against the far wall and a wood stove. Aside from a broom and a bucket in one corner, nothing else was in the cabin.

"Hikers' rest stop," Kuznicki guessed. "Or maybe a refuge for hunters caught in blizzards in the winter-time."

"Who cares which?" Karl inquired. "Looks perfect to me. Let's get this over with."

They went back outside.

Sabrina awakened in total darkness. The side of her neck ached where the heavy set Karl had delivered a karate chop, and she was having difficulty breathing. She quickly realized that had nothing to do with the condition of her neck, though. It was because she was inside a cloth sack. It was the laundry bag Karl Janoski had been carrying when he and Paul Kuznicki forced their ways into the suite, she surmised.

The bag was in a moving vehicle.

She felt upward to the mouth of the bag with both hands. It had a slight opening there, enough to have let in sufficient air to prevent her suffocating. Pushing both hands through the opening, palms outward, she managed to spread it wide enough to get her right hand outside. Feeling around until she located the knot in the drawstring, she began to pick at it.

Because no light came through the opening in the neck of the bag, she assumed she was in a car trunk. When the knot finally gave and she spread the opening wide, she knew she was, because she bumped her elbow on the lid.

Instead of trying to crawl out of the bag, she pushed it down off her body as though removing a dress. When she was free of it, she kicked it away in a corner of the trunk.

Since there was no crack of light anywhere in the car trunk, she assumed it was airtight. The stuffiness of the air reinforced that conclusion. While it was easier to breathe than it had been inside the bag, she knew that eventually she would suffocate in such a small, confined space as her lungs gradually filtered all the oxygen from the air and replaced it with carbon dioxide. She began to practice shallow breathing.

She was lying on her side, facing the rear, her head on the left side of the trunk and her buttocks pressed against the spare tire. Her knees were drawn up in front of her.

By shifting position so that she lay partially on her right side and partially on her back, she managed to press her feet against the underside of the trunk lid. After straining against it for a few moments, she decided the lock was too strong to break in that manner, and the exertion was only making her use up too much precious oxygen. She relaxed, her feet still pressed against the trunk lid, but without force, and her breathing again controlled.

Twice the car turned off on bumpy roads for short distances, she noted, only to turn around and retrace its way to paved road. Sabrina guessed that her kidnappers were hunting for a secluded spot—a thought that put cold fingers around her heart.

Then she felt the car make a U-turn, drive back the way they had come for a short distance, then swing left and halt. After a short period it continued on along a bumpy surface that had to be either dirt or gravel. The car reduced speed to a crawl.

After what seemed to Sabrina an interminable length of time, but was probably no more than five or ten minutes, the jouncing motion of the car stopped and the sound of the engine died. She heard two car doors slam, then there was a long silence.

Eventually the silence was broken by the sound of a key being inserted in the trunk lock. Sabrina braced her feet against the underside of the lid.

As the lock clicked open, Sabrina straightened her legs to slam the lid wide open with considerable force. It caught the heavyset Karl flush on the chin, driving him back into Paul Kuznicki, who was right behind him. Both men fell to the ground in a floundering heap. Scrambling from the trunk, Sabrina took off like a deer.

A few yards from the car was a small log cabin. Sabrina raced past it, leaped a small stream and headed for a stand of trees and heavy underbrush a few yards beyond the stream. A pistol cracked just as she reached the stand of trees and wood splinters stung her right cheek as she swung herself around behind a thick tree bole.

She ran for another tree, using the first as cover, and crouched behind it to gaze back. Paul Kuznicki, a gun in his hand and an enraged expression on his face, was striding her way. The heavy Karl Janoski was groggily climbing to his feet, feeling his chin and cursing.

Sabrina ran for the protection of another tree, then to a fourth one. But then she realized she had picked the wrong direction for flight, because she was going away from the highway: the ground was rising sharply. When she came to the far edge of the stand of trees, she stopped to gaze ahead in dismay. From there on the ground lifted even more sharply, to become the side of a mountain. And there was no cover.

If she tried to climb the mountain, her pursuer could pick her off with ease.

The sound of Kuznicki forcing his way through the underbrush came from behind her. Sabrina ran to the left, across twenty yards of open space, for a thick clump of underbrush. Two shots sounded, kicking dirt at her heels, before she dived into the underbrush onto her hands and knees and crawled rapidly for the protection of the nearest tree.

Fourteen

As she came to her feet behind the tree, she heard Kuznicki's feet pounding toward her across the clearing, and Janoski, presumably recovered from his blow on the chin, crashing through the underbrush toward her from the flank. Spinning, Sabrina ran on, parallel to the base of the mountain, hoping to place enough distance between her and her pursuers to be able to circle back toward the cabin.

The underbrush was thick here, and tore at her

clothing. Numerous trees afforded cover, however, and she considered that to be an advantage worth the ruination of a two-hundred-dollar pantsuit.

Sabrina could run, and her slimness gave her an advantage over her pursuers in sliding through the thick bushes. The sounds of pursuit were fading when she burst from the undergrowth into another clear area. She halted in consternation. Directly in front of her was the rim of a cliff. After a moment she ran over to look down, hoping but not really expecting to find a short enough drop-off to manage without injuring herself.

The drop was a good hundred feet, almost sheer, and onto rocks.

She started to run to the left, but halted again when she heard Karl call from that direction, "Paul, where are you?" The voice came from no more than fifty yards away.

From perhaps an equal distance behind her Kuznicki's voice called, "Here, Karl. Angle in toward the mountain."

Sabrina slipped back into the underbrush and began working as quietly as possible toward a point halfway between the two voices. She had gone no more than twenty yards when she heard snapping twigs and heavy breathing off to her right. Crouching behind a tree, Sabrina peered in that direction to see the heavyset Karl moving directly toward her. He was going to pass right by her tree, she realized.

Rising to her feet, she circled the tree as he went by, keeping it between them. As soon as he was past, she moved cautiously in the other direction, placing her feet carefully so as to make no sound.

She came to another clearing and paused to peer out. It was the clearing in which the cabin sat, she was pleased to see.

From the direction of the cliff Karl's voice called, "Paul?"

There was no answer. That worried her, but when a thorough scanning of the area disclosed no sign of Kuznicki, she ventured out into the open. Leaping over the narrow stream, she ran for the parked Ford, hoping

they had been careless enough to leave the key in the ignition.

She never found out, because as she ran past the cabin, Paul Kuznicki's voice snapped, "Hold it right there, sister!"

Halting, she turned to see him leaning against the front of the log cabin, aiming a pistol at her.

"Thought you might try doubling back," he said with satisfaction. "Get in there." He gestured with his head toward the cabin door.

As Sabrina obediently went inside, Karl again called, "Paul, where are you?"

Making no answer, Kuznicki followed Sabrina inside. Holding his gun on her, he slipped off the string necktie he was wearing.

"Turn around and put your hands behind your back," he ordered.

When she complied, he put away his gun, gripped her wrists and quickly bound them with the string tie.

"You're gonna get no chance to use judo on me again," he growled into her ear.

Then he spun her around and pushed her over against one of the wooden bunks. When the calves of her legs hit the edge of the bunk, she sat heavily.

Karl's voice came to them again, still far away, "Paul, where are you?"

"Why don't you answer him?" Sabrina asked.

"He'll find his way back," Kuznicki said. "Meanwhile, we don't need an audience."

"Audience for what?" she asked with suspicion.

"You cost me three hundred bucks, baby, for champagne that wasn't ever drunk. I'm gonna get what you promised."

He took off his sport jacket and hung it over the back of a chair. Then he removed his gun harness and lay it on the table. He took off his shirt and undershirt and draped them over his sport coat.

Grinning at her, he flexed his muscles. He was a well-built man, and obviously proud of it. Under different circumstances Sabrina might have admired his leanly

sinewed body, but now all he inspired in her was dread.

"You're an animal," she hissed at him. "The only way you could get a woman is to tie her up."

Walking over to gaze down at her with hands on his hips, he said, "I've never had any complaints, baby. You may as well relax and enjoy it, because it's going to be your last experience."

After raping her, he was going to kill her, she realized. In the back of her mind she had known that was his and Karl's intention ever since she awoke in the trunk of the car, but now it was out in the open as a stated fact. She was overcome by fear.

Leaning down, he gripped Sabrina's ankles and flipped her onto her back. Then he reached to unbutton her jacket.

Drawing her knees up to her chest, Sabrina lashed out with both feet, catching him in the center of the chest and driving him back clear across the room. She was up from the bunk and over to the table at the same moment he crashed into the wall next to the door. By the time he recovered and started for her, she had spun her back to the table and had jerked the pistol from its holster.

It was a short-barreled .38. With her hands tied behind and her back to him, looking over her shoulder, she cocked the gun and fired.

The slug plucked at the inner side of his right pantleg before plowing into the floor. As Sabrina recocked the gun, he made a headfirst dive through the open doorway, landed on his hands to make a gymnast's tumble that put him back on his feet, and darted around the side of the cabin.

Rushing outdoors and over to the corner of the cabin, Sabrina spotted him racing for the stand of trees beyond the narrow stream. Turning her back to him, but with her head swiveled to keep him in view over her shoulder, she fired again. The shot went wild, but it added to his speed. Hurtling over the stream, he dived into the undergrowth and disappeared.

Sabrina saw the heavyset Karl lumbering toward her

now from the direction of the cliff, his gun outthrust before him. Swinging her back toward him, she squeezed the trigger twice.

The first time the gun fired, but the second time the hammer merely clicked. Belatedly Sabrina remembered that Kuznicki had fired at her three times. Apparently he hadn't reloaded, because her three shots had emptied the gun.

Karl didn't know that, though, and seemed not to have heard the click, because he dived for cover. Sabrina headed down the lane at a dead run.

As she ran, a shot sounded, but the bullet came nowhere near her. Then she was around a curve in the lane, out of Karl's sight because of the high undergrowth edging the lane on both sides.

It was like running through a roofless tunnel. Sabrina felt she was breaking all speed records for cross-country running. She knew there was no way she could outrun the car, though, because from the time it had taken to reach the cabin, she estimated it must be two to three miles from the highway. Even before she heard the Ford's engine come to life and the car begin to roar after her, she had decided that her best chance lay in concealment rather than in flight.

Coming to a panting halt, she carefully pushed her way through the undergrowth on the left side of the lane so as to disturb it as little as possible. She worked her way back a half-dozen yards from the lane before dropping flat facing the lane.

The sound of the approaching car grew in volume. It went by at about ten miles an hour, the heavyset Karl driving and Kuznicki struggling into his shirt. It continued on only a short distance before the engine sound suddenly died.

Climbing to her feet, Sabrina considered the significance of this. It wasn't hard to figure out. They had driven to a point beyond which they knew Sabrina could not possibly have run before they got there, then had halted to spread out and search for her, knowing she had to be somewhere behind them.

Even as thick as the undergrowth was, she sus-

pected that if she simply stayed where she was, eventually one of them would find her. Her best chance was to cut across country and hope to come out on a side road where there were houses. Climbing to her feet, she headed east.

It was both slow going and tough going. She slipped between grasping branches as noiselessly as possible, knowing how sound traveled in the forest, which reduced her progress to a snail's pace, but was much safer than headlong flight. This was brought home to her because periodically she could hear her pursuers off in the distance, floundering through the underbrush.

The brush seemed unendingly thick. Whatever her initial dash between grasping branches after leaping from the car trunk hadn't done to her clothing, this hike was finishing. By the time she got out of this, if she ever did, she knew her expensive pantsuit would be ready for the rag bag.

After a time she could no longer hear the sound of her pursuers crashing through the undergrowth. Halt ing to listen, she suddenly realized she was still carrying the gun behind her. She decided to take the time to attempt to get free of her bonds.

After a short search, she found a tree crotch close enough to the ground to suit her purpose. Moving backward to it and firmly wedging the pistol into the crotch, she managed to work the gunsight into the knot in the necktie binding her wrists behind her. After a considerable amount of tugging, she felt the knot begin to loosen. A few more tugs and it came completely free.

Tossing the necktie aside, Sabrina rubbed the circulation back into her wrists. Then she tried to retrieve the pistol, only to find it so firmly wedged into the crotch of the tree that she couldn't get it loose easily. Shrugging, she left it there and continued on.

It seemed to her that hours had passed, with no sign of the heavy undergrowth ever coming to an end.

Halting to rest, she looked at her watch. It was 5:30 in the afternoon.

That left only an hour and a half until the banquet started. If she was ever going to make it back to the hotel by then, she was going to have to forget rest stops, she decided. She moved on at a quicker pace.

The end of the ordeal came suddenly and unexpectedly. One moment she was still struggling through the thick growth, the next she was at the edge of a narrow ditch beyond which was a rutted dirt road. Across the road was a barbed-wire fence beyond which several horses grazed. A couple of hundred yards to her left, on the same side of the road as the horses, was a farmhouse and a large red barn. To her right, only about a hundred yards away, she could see the main highway. She considered whether to turn that way and try to hitchhike into the village, or walk the farther distance to the farmhouse and hope they had a phone.

There was a third alternative, but it didn't appeal to her much. She had come to the end of the forested area, and from here on, as far as she could see, rolling farmland paralleled the highway. She could continue across country, which would be a lot safer than hitchhiking, and the walking would be considerably easier than it had been up to now. The trouble was that she had no idea how far the village was, and it might still be a half-dozen miles away.

While she was considering these alternatives, she heard a car turn from the highway onto the dirt road. Seeing it was a Ford sedan of the same color as her kidnappers', she drew back out of sight into the undergrowth.

Her heart climbed into her throat when the car rolled slowly by. It was the kidnappers' car, and its two occupants were both carefully studying her side of the road!

Obviously, when they hadn't been able to find her in the underbrush, they had deduced her plan and given up their hopeless search in order to attempt to head her off when she finally came out of the forested area.

Probably they had been repeatedly cruising the highway near this road, looking for some sign of her.

She watched as the Ford continued along the dirt road to the lane leading to the farmhouse and turned in there, presumably to check if she had ducked inside to make a phone call.

Hitchhiking was now out, because the kidnappers probably would be the first to offer her a ride. The farmhouse was now out, because they might be checking it periodically. Heading across country was out, because she would be right out in the open where she could be spotted from a half-mile off.

She had to think of some fourth alternative.

Fifteen

Jill and Kelly had been watching the chalet for about an hour when the panel truck returned and parked on the lake side of the building, out of their range of vision. Apparently the driver entered the building by the rear door, because he didn't come around to the front one.

Jill said to Kelly. "Maybe you'd better get the car and drive it over to where you can see that panel truck. Then if it takes off again, you can follow."

"Good idea," Kelly agreed, then paused long enough to add a postscript to Sabrina's note before heading for the door. She didn't have to ask Jill for the keys, because the girls all carried keys to each other's cars.

Jill continued to watch the chalet. She saw Kelly pull the car into position near the lake end of the parking lot, from where she could see the panel truck, but there was no sign of activity from the tiny lodging.

Then, after about ten minutes, the front door opened and fat Walther Bartkowiak and the thin man they had decided was Mateusz Krzal emerged together. They walked around the building to disappear behind it, and a moment later the panel truck drove off. Jill saw Kelly follow in her car.

Jill stepped out on the porch, climbed the railing and hurried across the grass to the fern-edged path leading to Chalet D. The door opened to her touch. Stripping away the Scotch Tape still over the lock's bolt, she wadded it into a ball and tossed it into an ashtray in the front room.

She first checked the bedroom to the left. It was empty, but the bedspread showed signs of someone having been lying on it.

Jill crossed to the other bedroom. It too was empty, and the bedspread there showed similar signs of someone having rested on it.

Presumably the two prisoners had been taken out the back door to be loaded into the panel truck. Jill was wondering puzzledly why the fat man and the thin driver had exited by the front door to round the building after taking the prisoners out the back way, when she found out. That had been for her benefit, she realized, when fat Walther Bartkowiak stepped from his bathroom with a nine-millimeter automatic in his hand.

"Is pleasure to see you again, Miss Cleaning Maid," he said with a sardonic smile. "Please to be seated."

He indicated the bed with his gun muzzle. Sinking onto its edge, Jill demurely folded her hands in her lap.

"What now?" she inquired.

"We wait for car."

"You ordered it in advance?" Jill asked. "You knew I was coming?"

"The sticky tape you so clever put on the lock, it made seem likely. The car driver has been watch the front door. He see you come in, it is the signal to bring about the car."

"How ingenious," Jill said dryly. "A masterpiece of conspiracy."

The fat man had been smiling smugly, but now the smile faded. "Sarcasm I do not like, Miss Cleaning Maid. You would like gun barrel to smash across your face?"

"No," Jill said meekly.

She heard the sound of a car pulling up behind the chalet. A moment later she heard the back door open and close, then the hook-nosed man who was going under the name of Anton Rabitch appeared in the bedroom doorway. After looking Jill over thoroughly, he turned to the fat man.

"Think we need to tie her?" he asked.

Walther Bartkowiak hefted his gun. "I all right can manage her."

Shrugging, the hook-nosed man said, "Then let's get moving."

He turned to leave the room. The fat man motioned with his gun for Jill to follow. Rising, she tailed after the fake Anton Rabitch. The fat man brought up the rear.

The hook-nosed man stood in the rear doorway surveying the surroundings for a few moments before stepping outdoors. When he saw no one in sight except two men fishing from a skiff a hundred yards offshore, he went over to open the rear door of the Cadillac parked behind the chalet.

"All clear," he called back.

Bartkowiak urged Jill outdoors and into the back-seat of the car. Squeezing in next to her, he lay the gun barrel on his thick left thigh, aimed at her navel.

"Would not be wise to make sudden movement," he warned her.

"Would not dream of make sudden movement," she assured him.

He frowned at the mockery of his accent. "Sarcasm, I told you, I not like," he said gutturally.

He raised the gun barrel as though to slap her

with it, and Jill cringed away from him. Lowering it to rest on his thigh again, he gave her a wolfish grin.

"You feel like make more funnies sometime?"

"No," she said sincerely.

The hook-nosed man had closed the rear door and had rounded the car to slide behind the wheel. "Which way?" he asked as he started the engine.

The fat man said, "East around the lake, Mateusz said, to fourth lane toward the lake leading. Is marked on the mailbox, 'George W. North.' "

At the street running in front of the hotel the Cadillac turned left. A block farther on, the road vee'ed, the left part of the V circling around the lake about fifty yards from the water. The hook-nosed man took that route.

The fat man said to Jill, "Would save time, you answer questions before we get where we go. Time and pain. You answer eventual anyway, you see. Comprehend?"

"I'm afraid I do," Jill said. "I don't care much for pain. What do you want to know?"

"Number one, your name."

"Jill Munroe."

"From where?"

"Los Angeles."

"Your business?"

Jill had been framing a plausible answer for that inevitable question ever since the fat man had stepped from the bathroom with a gun in his hand. She answered promptly, "I do legwork for Jack Sommerville."

Frowning down at the shapely legs exposed by her short skirt, Bartkowiak said, "Legwork? You pose for photographer, perhaps?"

The driver said, "Jack Sommerville is a columnist for the *Los Angeles Times*, comrade. Legwork means she digs up news items for him."

After considering this, the fat man nodded. Apparently he swallowed Jill's story, because he asked, "Your interest in me, Miss Munroe?"

"I'm covering the Wycinski banquet for Jack," she

said. "As a matter of routine I checked the guest register at the hotel. When I saw the name of an important member of the Polish consulate at Los Angeles, my curiosity was aroused. Considering Professor Wycinski's views on the present Polish regime, it seemed unlikely you were here to cheer him on. Like a good reporter, I decided to investigate."

"Like a good reporter, why you not just ask from me an interview?"

"Oh, I planned to do that too. But it has been my sad experience that some people I interview do not tell the truth. So I decided to bug your chalet to pick up your off-the-cuff remarks to your associates."

"Bug? Is what, 'bug'?"

"Electronic eavesdropping devices, comrade," the driver said. "As a former member of the secret police, surely you know what they are."

"Oh," the fat man said. "Listeners. So show me this listener."

"It's planted in the front room of your chalet," Jill told him.

He looked mildly exasperated. "So you have no proof you came only to affix bug. Something you expected to find in cabin, perhaps?"

"Like what?" Jill asked innocently.

"You expect me believe you put listener in cabin with no suspicion something rotten in Denmark? You go all that trouble only because I with Polish consulate? I do not believe."

"Is something rotten in Denmark?" Jill asked innocently. "Or, rather, in the Mountain Tarn Hotel?"

Bartkowiak made no answer, merely scowling at her.

After a short period of silence, the driver spoke. "Something you ought to know, comrade. When she went over to the chalet, she came from the same suite where the professor visited that Duncan girl."

The fat man cocked an eyebrow at Jill. "Sabrina Duncan do legwork also?"

"She's just a friend," Jill said quickly. "I borrowed her suite because it gave me a good view of the chalet."

"I think she's lying," the fake Anton Rabitch said. "The Duncan girl lunched with another girl in the coffee shop today. I think there's three of them in that suite."

"You got something to say to that?" the fat man asked Jill.

On the principle that the less truth she told, the less help she would give her kidnappers, Jill said, "Far as I know, Sabrina's in that suite by herself. But then I didn't ask her. I just happened to run into her on the tennis court, she told me where her suite was, and gave me a key to it in case I wanted to change there. I'm not registered at the hotel, you see. I have a motel room down the street."

The Cadillac slowed and the driver peered out to the left. Jill looked that way too. They were approaching a narrow dirt lane leading toward the lake. As they neared, Jill could make out "George W. North" lettered on a roadside mailbox. Next to the mailbox was a wooden sign lettered "Lakeside Cottage for Rent by Week." Below that was the name and telephone number of a realty company.

The Cadillac swung into the lane. Fifty yards along it, at the lake's edge, was a small frame cottage. Parked alongside the cottage was the white panel truck.

The hook-nosed man parked behind the panel truck. Getting out of the car, he opened the rear door on Jill's side, drew a gun and covered her as she got out. Fat Walther Bartkowiak got out the other side, put away his gun and waddled around to join them.

Lean Mateusz Krzal emerged from the front door of the cottage and examined Jill curiously. After acknowledging his presence with a nod, the fake Anton Rabitch glanced around in all directions.

"What's the story on this place, Mateusz?" he asked finally.

In as strong a Slavic accent as Bartkowiak's the thin man answered, "Is owned by a man lives San Francisco. When not here, he rent it by week through local

real estate people. I rent it one week under name John Smith."

"Original," the hook-nosed man grunted. He glanced toward the panel truck. "You get them inside?"

"Rabitch only. The other one too big for me to carry alone."

Turning back to Jill, the hook-nosed man motioned with his gun for her to go inside.

Walther Bartkowiak said, "Wait. You think it wise she see what in there?"

"What difference does it make?" the hook-nosed man asked. "She's not going to tell anyone."

Jill felt a chill run along her spine.

"You feel that necessary?" the fat man said.

"I'm sure it's necessary, comrade. She's lying through her teeth. I think she and the Duncan girl and the other one are all working together, and I don't think they have anything to do with columnist Jack Sommerville. I think they're either members of the Polish-American Freedom League, or else some kind of cops hired by the league."

"But she doesn't actually know something," the fat man protested. "What matters who she is, so long as it is only suspicion she has?"

"I'm with you, chubby," Jill said encouragingly. "I don't really have any deep-rooted suspicion, really."

Bartkowiak scowled at her.

The hook-nosed man said, "She knows something, or she wouldn't have tried that stunt with the Scotch Tape. Maybe she doesn't know the full story, but we can't afford even suspicion. They probably share information, so all three of them are equally dangerous. The Duncan woman's already taken care of, and we'll have to go after the third one after we take care of Miss Munroe—if that's her real name."

Jill felt a mixture of terror for herself and grief for Sabrina. *The Duncan woman's already taken care of*, he had said. Kelly's fear had been right. Something had happened to Sabrina.

Apparently the fat man succumbed to the argument, because he made no further objection to Jill

seeing the inside of the cottage. The thin Mateusz went ahead to open the door, and the hook-nosed man gestured for Jill to follow.

The cottage consisted of only a single large room that was a combination living room, kitchen and bedroom. There were two double bunks against the left wall, a table and chairs in the center of the room, a stove, refrigerator, sink and some cupboards along the rear wall. An open door to the right led into a bathroom.

Lying on one of the lower bunks, still unconscious, was the same lean, rather handsome man Jill had seen through the crack in the drapes at the chalet. From what Mateusz had said, she now knew that her initial suspicion had been correct. He was the real Anton Rabitch.

The hook-nosed man directed Jill to seat herself on one of the wooden chairs, then Mateusz bound her to the chair with a length of clothesline. He did a thorough job of it. When he finished she found herself unable to move.

Putting away his gun, the hook-nosed man said to Mateusz, "Okay, let's go get the other one."

Jill was left with the fat man, who regarded her broodingly as the other two left the cottage. In a few minutes they returned staggering under the burden of a large man bound hand and foot with rope similar to that binding Jill.

The man was not completely conscious, but he wasn't unconscious either. His eyes were blinking and he was muttering incoherently, as though just beginning to awaken from a drugged sleep. Jill gazed at him with her mouth open as they carried him over to the other lower bunk and dropped him upon it.

The big man was Professor Peter Wycinski.

Sixteen

When Kelly had brought Jill's car around to where she could see behind the chalet, the white panel truck was still there, and a thin, dark man was just closing its rear door. The enormously fat man who had answered the door when Jill, in her cleaning maid's uniform, had knocked, was just entering the back door of the chalet. Kelly wished she had gotten there sooner because she suspected the prisoners from the chalet had just been transferred to the panel truck.

The thin man followed the fat man inside. Kelly cut the engine and waited for something to happen.

From where she was, she could see the sliding glass door of hers and the other angels' suite clearly, and could see the dim figure of Jill standing just inside. Her glance casually touched the suite next door, occupied by Professor Wycinski, then fixed on its sliding door. A dim figure stood just inside the glass there too. At that distance she couldn't make out who it was, but it was not as large as the professor. She guessed it was either one of the FBI men, or the hook-nosed man who claimed to be Anton Rabitch.

Of course just because Jill was spying, it didn't necessarily follow that the person next door was also spying on anyone. Perhaps he was merely enjoying the view, or was watching the two fishermen in an off-shore skiff. After gazing that way for some time without being able to make out the watcher's features, Kelly gave up and returned her attention to the chalet.

About ten minutes after she pulled into position, both the fat man and the thin one came from the front door of the chalet and rounded the building to

its rear. The thin man climbed behind the wheel of the panel truck, while the fat man went back inside by the rear door. The panel truck moved off.

Kelly was confronted by a dilemma. It didn't occur to her that a deliberate trap was being set for Jill. She merely assumed that for some reason the big man at the last minute had decided not to go along in the truck. But she knew Jill couldn't have seen him re-enter by the back door, and that Jill would take advantage of both occupants being away to check out the chalet. Kelly wanted to warn her that one of the men was still there, but then she would have had to scratch following the panel truck. Deciding Jill could take care of herself, she opted to follow the truck.

The thin man led her to the eastern edge of the village, where the road vee'd, the right leg continuing straight on, the left circling around the lake. A couple of miles beyond the V the truck turned left into a dirt lane leading toward the lake.

Kelly drove on by, noting that the roadside mailbox was lettered "George W. North," and that there was a For Rent sign next to the mailbox. About fifty yards farther on she came to another dirt lane, this one also showing a For Rent sign, but with an unmarked mailbox. Turning into the lane, she drove along it to the lakeside cottage at its end.

It was her intention to excuse her trespass by asking directions to the village if the cottage was occupied. But that proved unnecessary, because the windows were boarded up. She parked the car on the side of the cottage away from the one owned by George W. North.

Nothing was between the two cottages except a few scrublike trees, but along the edge of the lake a thick growth of tall reeds extended out from the shore about six feet. The areas in front of both cottages had been cleared of the growth, but it ran from the edge of one property to the edge of the other.

Kelly regretted not having her new swimsuit with her, because she could have swum to within a few yards of the other cottage, concealed among the reeds.

Then she spotted a beached skiff at the water's edge and went down to examine it. It was a twelve-footer, equipped with oarlocks and with a pair of oars in its bottom.

Glancing toward the other cottage, she saw the door begin to open. Since she was in full view from there, she dropped flat behind the skiff, then cautiously raised her head.

The thin man had emerged from the cottage. He looked around in all directions before going over to the panel truck and opening its back door. He climbed inside. As the side of the truck was toward Kelly, she couldn't see what he was doing inside, but in moments he reappeared, staggering under the weight of a man he was holding across his shoulders in a fireman's carry. At that distance Kelly couldn't make out what the man looked like, but she could see he was slim and was dressed in a business suit.

The thin man carried him into the cottage, reappeared long enough to slam the back door of the truck, then went back into the cottage.

Rising to her feet, Kelly dragged the skiff down to the lake, pushed it in and scrambled aboard as it floated free. She lifted the oars, set them in the locks and rowed toward the other cottage, keeping close to shore. When she neared the end of the bank of reeds, she nosed the skiff into them. The boat came to rest surrounded by the thick growth, the reeds a good three feet high, completely shielding her from view from the cottage. She used an oar to part them enough so that she herself could see out.

Jill had said there were two prisoners at the chalet. If both had been moved, the thin man must have carried the other one from the truck inside before Kelly got in position to see the cottage. Or else the second prisoner was still in the panel truck. Or else only one had been moved, and the other was still back at the chalet.

The way to find out was to get peeks into both the truck and the cottage, she decided. She drew in the oar she was using to part the reeds for viewing in or-

der to use it as a pole to push the skiff's bow up on shore. But she stopped, and pushed the reeds aside with it again when she heard a car coming along the lane.

The white Cadillac driven by the man claiming to be Anton Rabitch appeared and parked behind the panel truck. In the back seat were the fat man and Jill.

She should have warned Jill instead of following the panel truck, Kelly thought guiltily.

She watched as the hook-nosed man got out, drew a gun and held it on Jill as she got out of the car. The fat man got out on the other side, putting away a gun as he did. The thin driver of the panel truck came outside and there was some conversation. Kelly strained to hear it, but they were about sixty feet away. She could hear the murmur of voices, but was unable to make out any words.

Then everyone went inside, Jill still under the hook-nosed man's gun.

Kelly pushed the skiff clear of the reeds and rowed back to the other cottage. Driving the bow of the boat up on shore, she climbed out and ran for Jill's car. Seating herself in the front seat, she called the agency number on the car phone.

John Bosley's voice answered, "Townsend Investigations."

"Kelly, Boz. Jill's in trouble."

"I understand you all are," Bosley said. "Charlie briefed me on the situation."

"He doesn't know about *this*," Kelly said. "Jill's been kidnapped by Walther Bartkowiak and that hook-nosed man who says he's Anton Rabitch, but we think isn't."

"Kidnapped!" Bosley said on a high note.

"Yes. They're holding two other prisoners too, at least one of them in the same place they have Jill, and maybe both. We suspect one is the real Anton Rabitch, the other is Professor Wycinski's son."

"Your second guess is wrong," Bosley told her. "Charlie checked up on Jon Wycinski. The reason he

hasn't shown there is because he's in a San Francisco hospital with a broken leg. His taxi crashed into a truck on the way to the airport."

"Then who is the second man?" Kelly asked.

"I haven't the slightest idea. Do you think Jill is in danger of being hurt or killed by her kidnappers?"

"Apparently they haven't killed anyone yet. But you never know. Just being kidnapped strikes me as danger enough. I'm going to call the sheriff."

"Don't do that just yet," Bosley said quickly. "At least not unless you really think she's in dire danger. Do you?"

"I honestly don't know, Bosley. When I saw her with the kidnappers a few minutes ago, she didn't look damaged. And so far they haven't done anything to their two other prisoners, we think, except shoot drugs in them to keep them asleep. But why hold off?"

"Because Charlie talked with the State Department, and they want this handled with kid gloves. No publicity."

"Do they know what's going on?" Kelly inquired.

"They haven't the slightest. But don't you understand the workings of bureaucracy? When you don't know what's going on, the first rule is no publicity. Let's do it this way. If you have even the faintest suspicion that Jill is going to suffer serious harm, get the cops in on it fast. Otherwise play it the State Department's way. Okay?"

"Okay," Kelly agreed.

"Where is Jill being held?"

"In a rented lakeside cottage a couple of miles east of the village. The name on the mailbox is George W. North."

"Do you girls have your guns with you?"

"Of course not, Boz. We're on vacation. Or were supposed to be."

"Well, there must be a pawnshop somewhere in that area. Why don't you and Sabrina pick up a couple of guns and quietly rescue Jill?"

"I don't know where Sabrina is."

"What do you mean, you don't know?"

"Just that. She wasn't in the suite when Jill and I returned from a little espionage work, and she hadn't left a note."

"Did you check the tennis courts, or the pool?"

"Bosley, she was supposed to be waiting for a callback from Charlie."

After a moment of silence, Bosley asked, "You think she's been kidnapped too?"

Kelly too was silent for a moment before saying, "That hadn't occurred to me. If she isn't back at the suite when I get there, maybe I'd better assume she's in the cottage with the other prisoners."

"You're going back to the suite now?"

"May as well drop in while I'm at the hotel. And I have to go back there for a gun. I didn't see any pawnshop in the village, but there's a sporting-goods store at the hotel. I'll pick up a gun and charge it to Charlie."

"A pawnshop would be cheaper," Bosley protested.

"Bosley, you have the mind of a bookkeeper," Kelly said, and hung up.

Seventeen

By the car's dash clock Kelly saw that it was ten after four, less than three hours until the banquet. She started the car, backed and turned, and broke the speed limit on the way back to the hotel.

Sabrina was not in the suite, and the note Kelly and Jill had left for her still lay on the writing table. Kelly hurried along the corridor from the suite to the sporting-goods shop off the lobby.

A muscular young clerk waited on her. He showed no surprise when she asked to see handguns. He di-

rected her to a case where there was a wise selection.

"Protection or target shooting?" he asked.

"Some of both," Kelly told him. "I'll take that one." She pointed to a snub-nosed .32 revolver similar to the ones the girls customarily carried. She charged it and a box of cartridges to her hotel bill, which in effect charged it to Charlie, since he was picking up the hotel bill.

As she signed for the gun, the muscular young clerk asked, "Aren't you a friend of Miss Munroe's?"

Kelly gave him a quick glance, wondering if he had witnessed the kidnapping. "Yes."

"Would you tell her her racquet is ready?"

Kelly drew a blank on that, until she remembered that Jill had left her racquet there to be restrung.

"Yes, I will," she said. "Thanks."

She hurried on out. Back in the car she loaded the gun and dropped it into her purse. She was parked again at the boarded-up cottage by 4:30.

Lifting the phone, she called Bosley again, meaning to tell him that she had obtained a gun, was moving in to rescue Jill, and possibly Sabrina also, and that if he didn't hear back from her within an hour to call the police. But all she got was a recorded message that the office was closed for the day, and at the sound of a beep, she had thirty seconds to record a message.

Irritably she hung up. Of all times for Bosley to goof off, this was the worst! she thought.

She got out of the car and went down to push the skiff into the water and jump aboard. She rowed it back to its previous spot in the reeds, but this time she drove the bow up on shore. Peering out through the weeds, she saw that the Cadillac was now gone, but the panel truck was still there. She saw that the shades were drawn over the cottage's windows.

Crawling to the bow of the skiff, Kelly clambered ashore. With a wary eye on the cottage, she quietly approached the panel truck and eased open its back door. Nothing of any interest was inside. As quietly as possible she clicked the door shut again.

She made a circuit of the cottage, attempting to see into the windows, but the shades were drawn tightly over all of them. There was only one door, and she got to that last. The upper part of the door had a glass pane. About to put her ear to it, she noticed a small hole in the shade. Instead she put her eye to the hole.

The interior was all one large room. Jill sat in the center of the room, near a table, bound to a chair and gagged. Seated at the table, sipping a cup of coffee, was the thin driver of the panel truck.

Along the wall to Kelly's left were two double bunks, both of the lowers with men lying in them, both of the men on their backs. A slim, rather good-looking man in a neat business suit obviously was unconscious. The other looked groggy, but his eyes were open and he was frowning toward the table. His hands and feet were bound. The man was large and bear-like. Kelly was thunderstruck to recognize him as Professor Peter Wycinski.

Taking the gun from her purse, Kelly slung the purse from her shoulder in order to leave her left hand free to grip the doorknob. Bending her eye to the hole in the shade again, she slowly turned the knob until it clicked open. The thin man seemed not to hear the click, because he didn't glance that way, but the professor's gaze shifted in her direction.

Kelly threw open the door, stepped inside and leveled the gun. "Freeze, mister," she ordered the thin man.

He turned his head to look at her with no sign of surprise. Kelly realized why when a man who had been standing out of her sight alongside the door pressed a gun muzzle to the back of her neck.

"You freeze, miss," the fat man's voice said. "Please to set your gun on the floor most careful."

Kelly bent slowly, making no sudden movements, and set the .32 on the floor. When she straightened again, the man behind her slid the purse off her shoulder. The thin man went over to pick up the snub-nosed revolver and put it in his pocket.

"Please to have a seat," the fat man invited, pushing Kelly in the direction of the table. "Mateusz,

you may Miss Munroe's gag remove now that she no longer can warn this young lady."

Kelly pulled one of the chairs away from the table, positioned it next to Jill and sat in it. Mateusz removed Jill's gag.

"You all right?" Kelly asked Jill.

"Physically. My self-esteem is a little damaged. I walked into a trap like the harebrained heroine of a gothic romance."

"I seem to have done the same thing," Kelly said ruefully.

"Chubby looked out the window and saw you checking out the panel truck," Jill informed her. "He had Mateusz gag me before I could yell a warning." She nodded toward the professor. "And he's still too groggy to give one."

Kelly looked that way. "Drugged?" she asked, noting the glazed eyes and dazed expression.

"Uh-huh. He seems to be shaking it off better than the other fellow, but he's still not quite with this world."

Kelly looked at the other man. "The real Anton Rabitch?"

"My guess," Jill said. Again she nodded toward the professor. "No wonder he didn't recognize Bree in the lobby. It was a double. Remember what Charlie said about Mateusz Krzal being a master of theatrical makeup?"

"Who Charlie?" Walther Bartkowiak inquired.

"Another legworker," Jill said quickly.

Regarding her without belief, the fat man said, "Sorry to interrupt this so interesting conversation." He turned to the thin man. "Mateusz, tie up Miss Munroe's friend. But not to the chair. Hands in front, please."

While Mateusz was binding Kelly's wrists, Walther Bartkowiak went through her purse. Reading from Kelly's driver's license, he said, "Kelly Garrett, Los Angeles address. Your business, Miss Garrett?"

"She does legwork for Jack Sommerville too," Jill

said before Kelly could answer. "I told you I was working alone only in order to protect her."

"Let the lady for herself speak," the fat man said in an annoyed voice. "When I questions ask, you choose not to answer. When I wish you shut up, you talk."

"I've had complaints about that before," Jill said. "You'd better let us go. Jack Sommerville is a powerful man. He'll track you to the ends of the earth if you harm a couple of his legworkers."

"Yeah," Kelly said. "You'll get so much bad publicity, you'll be recalled to Poland."

Mateusz finished tying Kelly's bonds and tested them. The fat man put away his gun.

Lifting her hands from her lap, Kelly asked, "Why do I get this favored treatment? You figure I'm less of a risk?"

"You will see," Bartkowiak told her. "Is necessary you may be lifted from chair." Continuing to check the contents of her purse, he said, "Credit cards, money. No press card saying you leg person."

"Jack likes his leg persons to remain anonymous," Kelly said.

Setting her purse on the table, the fat man went over to a wall phone and asked the operator for Los Angeles Information. When he asked Information about the number of the *Los Angeles Times*, both girls became a little uneasy. They became even more uneasy when he called the number and asked for Jack Sommerville.

After a few moments he said, "Good afternoon to you also, madam. Would like to speak to Miss Jill Munroe." There was a pause, then: "It was my understanding she employed by Mr. Sommerville as a leg person." After another pause: "Miss Kelly Garrett, then?"

He listened again, said, "Thank you. Sorry to have bothered," and hung up. Turning to the girls, he said sardonically, "Secretary to Mr. Sommerville say she never hear of you two."

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table, then took the end of the rope and pulled on it until Kelly was hauled upward to dangle with her feet six inches from the floor.

"Hey!" Jill protested, realizing what they had in mind. "You don't have to do this. I'll tell you whatever you want to know."

The fat man ignored her. Keeping the rope taut, Mateusz uncoiled enough to reach the rearmost bunk, on which the unconscious slim man lay, and tied it to a leg of the bunk. Kelly, arms stretched overhead and feet dangling, slowly turned in a circle.

Mateusz went over to pick up the towrope. Wrapping one end around his hand, he flicked it like a whip, expertly making it crack.

"No!" Jill said urgently. "Look, fellows, we'll tell you anything you want to know."

The fat man looked at her. "Start, then."

"We're just three girls on vacation. Our friend Sabrina is a big fan of Professor Wycinski. When he snubbed her after visiting her room, she knew something was wrong, and recruited us to help her find out what. We had no idea we were getting into anything this serious."

Looking bored, the fat man signaled Mateusz. Jill shouted, "Wait!" but it was too late. The rope-whip lashed out to strike Kelly's back with a splatting noise that brought a squeal of pain from her.

A long welt appeared on her bare skin.

Eighteen

"Please don't hit her anymore," Jill said with tears running down her face. "I'll tell everything. Honest."

"Who is Charlie?" the fat man asked.

"Charles Townsend. You know him. He put that scar over your eyebrow."

Bartkowiak looked startled. "The private detective?"

"Yes. We work for him. But he didn't send us here. What I told you is true. We're just on vacation. Sabrina's a fan of the professor—"

She broke it off to scream, "No!" when the fat man nodded to Mateusz and the rope-whip whistled again. Kelly groaned and let out a sob. Another welt appeared on her back.

"All right, I'll tell you the real truth!" Jill yelled. "We don't work for Charlie Townsend. We just retained him to gather some information for us. We're all members of the Polish-American Freedom League, Intelligence Division. Jill Munroe, Kelly Garret and Sabrina Duncan are cover names. Our real names are Jill Jakobiak, Kelly Karalus and Sabrina Maslach."

"Is much better," Bartkowiak said with a smile. "Just remember, each lie brings your friend another lash."

"I will tell you only the truth," Jill assured him.

"Good. You have told Charles Townsend what?"

"Nothing. Why should we tell him anything? We only hired him to check you and Mateusz out. Sabrina called him this afternoon. He already knew who you were, and told her about putting that scar on

your head. He called back later to tell us who Mateusz was."

"You have reported what to your superiors?"

"Again nothing. We had nothing to report until now."

"You mentioned nothing about Anton Rabitch?"

Jill started to shake her head, but when the fat man looked at Mateusz, she said hurriedly, "Sabrina suspected he wasn't Rabitch, and wanted to call our cell leader in New York City. Kelly and I disagreed with her, and talked her into holding off until we could get some evidence one way or the other. Obviously she was right." She nodded toward the slim man on one of the lower bunks. "That's the real Rabitch, isn't it?"

Ignoring the question, Bartkowiak said, "Then you have so far your suspicions reported to no one?"

"We haven't had anything to report. We had no idea what was going on until we saw the professor over there, and realized you ran in a ringer to deliver the speech tonight."

"But now you understand?"

"I can guess. You're going to have the professor's double say something that will help the Polish regime and embarrass its enemies."

"You smart girl," he said approvingly. "Unfortunately your knowledge make it necessary you cannot report truth after the speech." He turned to Mateusz. "Let her down."

Tossing the towrope onto the table, the thin man went over to undo the knot tying the other rope to the bunk leg. When he lowered Kelly to the floor, she collapsed in a heap.

Untying the half-inch rope from her wrists, but leaving her wrists bound by the original rope, he coiled the half-inch rope and carried it and the towrope outside.

When Mateusz returned, Kelly was still on the floor, her feet curled beneath her somewhat as in the lotus position of yoga, her body bent forward at the waist so that her head nearly touched the floor. The fat

man was leaning over her to examine the twin welts across her back.

"Skin not broken," he declared, straightening up. "No scars would leave if she lived to recover."

Kelly painfully raised her head to look up at him sideways, her cheeks tear-stained and her expression that of a wounded animal. "You toad," she said thickly. "You fat, ugly toad."

He made a tutting noise. "Is unladylike talk." He drew his gun. "Mateusz, help Miss Karalus back into her jacket."

The thin man lifted Kelly to her feet by the bare arms. She stood swaying as he untied her wrists.

Eyeing the gun, Jill asked bitterly, "You think after beating her half unconscious, she would jump the two of you if you didn't have that gun on her?"

"A wise man never underestimates," Bartkowiak said pompously, as though quoting some Polish proverb.

Mateusz held Kelly's jacket for her, then buttoned it for her after she painfully slid into it. She stood swaying groggily, her arms hanging limp at her sides, unable to assist with the buttoning.

When the jacket was buttoned, Mateusz steered Kelly over to the chair next to Jill, made her sit, and bound her to it tightly, this time with her wrists behind her back like Jill's.

Putting away his gun, the fat man said to Mateusz, "Let us go investigate method by which Miss Karalus got here. Must be vehicle parked nearby."

Both men went outside.

Jill asked Kelly, "Is your back terribly sore?"

"Sore enough," Kelly said, making a face but no longer speaking thickly. "I haven't been beaten like that since I left the orphanage. How did you dredge up those three Polish names so smoothly?"

"I went to grammar school in Buffalo for a while. Half the kids in school were either Polish or Italian. Rose Jakobiac, Anna Karalus and Stasia Maslach were my best friends in third grade."

From the side of the room a deep, mellifluous voice said, "They mean to kill you, you know."

Both girls looked that way. Jill asked, "The drug wearing off, professor?"

"Has been worn off for some time," the big man said. "Like Rasputin, I am hard to poison. I saw no point in letting my enemies know I have my faculties."

Kelly studied the man. "You're not tied to the bed are you?" she asked.

"No, young lady, but I am thoroughly tied."

"Could you roll off the bed?" she asked.

"Probably, but I fail to see the advantage of bruising myself."

"I was thinking you could roll over here, get behind one of us and untie our wrists."

The professor sighed. "I will try, young lady. But don't forget I am sixty-seven years old and full of dope. I doubt that I can roll with much grace."

"You hop porch railings pretty gracefully," Kelly said encouragingly. "Give it a try."

"Ah, your friend Sabrina has been telling stories. Where is she?"

Kelly said, "We don't know." Then she glanced at Jill to see a tear rolling down her cheek. "Jill do you know something I don't?"

"Oh, Kelly," Jill said brokenly. "I think they've killed Sabrina. That man pretending to be Anton Rabitch was arguing with the fat man about taking care of you and me. By that he meant killing us, I'm sure. He said, 'The Duncan woman's already taken care of.' Doesn't that sound like they killed her?"

Kelly said without much conviction, "Maybe they're just holding her somewhere, like us, Jill. Maybe they haven't done it yet."

"Why would they hold her somewhere else?" Jill asked in despair. "She wasn't in the chalet, because that's where they nabbed me. You think they have hideouts all over the countryside? If she were still alive, she'd be here."

"Never give up hope," the professor advised. "I have not, and I am sure they plan to kill me also. I promised to introduce pretty Sabrina to my son Jon,

and I plan to keep that promise. He should have arrived by now, and must be looking for me."

"Sorry, professor," Kelly said regretfully. "He's in a San Francisco hospital with a broken leg. His taxi ran into a truck on the way to the airport."

"Oh, my!" the professor said. "Did he suffer injuries other than the broken leg?"

"Not according to the report I got."

"Well, broken bones heal," Wycinski said philosophically. "The introduction will be postponed, but I still plan on it. Now prepare yourselves for a large crash, ladies. I am going to roll off the bed."

But at that moment the door opened and Walther Bartkowiak came back inside. Professor Wycinski relaxed and allowed his eyes to become glassy again.

"Your boat we found in the reeds, Miss Karalus," the fat man announced. "From the vacant cottage just northeast of us, perhaps?"

"I rowed it from the hotel," Kelly said.

"Unlikely, that seems, Miss Karalus. Mateusz now rowing to the cottage to check. Would be unwise let the police find eventually your car so nearby here."

"Eventually?" Jill said. "That means you're going to kill us?"

He gave her a wide smile. "Not immediate, Miss Jakobiac. Not until dark after. Was most thoughtful of your friend bring boat to us. Most convenient for row to center of lake after nightfall."

"You plan to dump the professor and Rabitch out there too?" Kelly asked.

"Oh, no. Quite different plans for them. After speech, despondent at damage he did beloved Poland before he see the light, professor take own life in his room. Rabitch, driving back to Los Angeles tomorrow morning, will have accident on mountain road and burn up in car. Body being unrecognizable, no one ever realize was not real Anton Rabitch at banquet."

Jill and Kelly looked at each other. "Fiendishly clever," Jill said sardonically. "These people are even shiftier than the CIA."

The fat man, pleased with himself, went over to the

recumbent professor, took a cigar from the man's breast pocket, bit off the end and put it in his mouth. Lighting it with a match, he waddled over to the table to seat himself and enjoy the cigar. Professor Wycinski turned his head to glare at the fat man's back with indignation.

Bartkowiak said something in Polish to Jill.

"Sorry," Jill said. "Third-generation Polish. My parents spoke it, but I don't."

The fat man looked at Kelly. "No, toad," she said with distaste. "I'm third-generation also."

Bartkowiak sighed. "Is the pattern. So sad that the young refuse to learn mother tongue. In Europe one is not educated unless speak at least two language. Here the arrogant American think everybody should learn his language."

The fat man had nearly finished his cigar when Mateusz came back inside.

"You were right, comrade," the thin man said. "Car is parked far side of vacant cottage. Will move it somewhere else after the—ah . . ." He let it trail off.

"You don't have to be so delicate, Mateusz," Jill told him. "After the murders, you mean."

Bartkowiak said, "Best place to move is back to hotel parking lot. Could sit there several days before anyone realize girls are missing."

That was a pleasant thought. The girls looked at each other for mutual support. Kelly tried to smile, but it came out more of a grimace.

"It doesn't get dark until about eight-thirty this time of year," Jill said in an unsuccessful attempt to cheer her up.

Nineteen

Eyeing the grazing horses across the road, Sabrina came to a decision. As soon as she saw Paul Kuznicki and Karl Janoski get out of the Ford and head for the farmhouse, she quickly crossed the road and climbed the barbedwired fence. She managed to hook a pantleg and put an additional tear in the cloth, but by then the pantsuit was a hopeless loss anyway.

All the horses except one gazed at her without much interest as she approached, then went back to grazing. But a big black stallion raised his head to eye her warily and snorted a warning when she came close. Naturally this was the one Sabrina picked.

"Hi, big fellow," she said cheerily, reaching out a hand to stroke his muzzle.

He tossed his head and snorted again, but made no objection when she rubbed her hand along the side of his neck. In addition to being a superb rider, she had always had a special rapport with horses. Once, at eight years of age, she had almost given her father a heart attack when he caught her riding bareback on an unbroken bronco which, the day before, had put a professional bronco buster in the hospital. Like this big black, the bronco had been a little skittish, but had made no real objection to her climbing onto his back.

"You ever been ridden bareback, big fellow?" she asked into the black's ear.

He nuzzled her neck.

Two hundred yards away she saw the Ford driving out of the farmhouse lane.

"No time for more preliminaries," she told the stallion, swinging herself up onto his back. Gripping his

mane with her left hand and slapping his rump with her right, she yelled, "Let's go, big fellow!" and steered him with her knees across the meadow away from the road.

The stallion took off at a gallop. Looking back over her shoulder, Sabrina saw that the two men in the Ford had spotted her and were looking her way. But of course they couldn't drive through the barbed-wire fence after her. They had to drive all the way to the main road, then turn left on it while she was cutting at an angle for the same road, riding roughly half the distance they had to cover.

As she neared the highway, Sabrina saw that there was a barbed-wire fence here too. Digging her heels into the stallion's sides, she shouted, "Take it, big fellow! Jump!"

He soared over the fence as though he had been trained for steeplechase competition. Then he was pounding along on the left-hand shoulder of the road at breakneck speed.

Behind her, Sabrina heard the roar of a car engine. Glancing over her shoulder, she saw the Ford far back, but gaining. Looking forward again, she spotted a dirt crossroad a hundred yards beyond.

She wasn't going to make the crossroad in time, she realized, as the roar of the car engine grew louder. Glancing sideways, she saw the Ford pulling abreast of her on the opposite side of the road. Paul Kuznicki had crawled over into the backseat in order to lower the left rear window, and was leveling a pistol at her. Presumably it was Karl's pistol, since Sabrina had left Kuznicki's in the crotch of a tree in the forest.

Sabrina braced herself for the bullet, but it was never fired, because a huge trailer truck coming the other way was suddenly between her and the Ford. Then she was at the crossroad. She gave a knee signal and the stallion galloped left around the corner.

The passing trailer truck blocked the maneuver from the view of those in the Ford. It shot on by the intersection. Sabrina heard the screech of brakes, then there

was the sound of the car moving on again, presumably in search of a place to turn around.

Sabrina saw a farm here too, on the right side of the road, again edged by a barbed-wire fence. She slowed the stallion to a trot to let him catch his breath, and kept a close watch over her shoulder.

She was a good hundred yards along the dirt road before the Ford turned onto it. Knowing effective pistol range was no more than twenty-five yards under the best of conditions, and probably half that when trying to fire from a moving car, Sabrina waited until the Ford was only about fifty yards behind her before urging the stallion to a gallop again. When the Ford had closed the gap to about twenty-five yards, she lifted the stallion over the fence into the meadow on the other side of the fence, and galloped away cross-country.

Looking back, she saw that the car had stopped and the two occupants were glaring after her.

Again she headed for the highway. The stallion hurtled over another fence and again galloped along the left shoulder. By the time the Ford turned around and drove back to the highway, they were approaching the village. The horse was galloping along Main Street in the center of town when the Ford reached its edge. That wasn't very far back, though, because the Lake Beaverdam village was merely three blocks long.

By the time Sabrina reached the only traffic light, in the center of the shopping section, the Ford was only a quarter-block behind and gaining rapidly. She wasn't too concerned, however, because the sidewalks were crowded with tourists, and it seemed unlikely that the two men would attempt murder in front of so many witnesses.

The light turned yellow just as Sabrina got there. She galloped on through, from the corner of her eye catching a glimpse of a sheriff's car waiting for the light to change on the cross-street.

The light turned red an instant before the Ford reached the intersection, but the heavyset Karl drove right on through. An instant later there was the growl of a siren. Sabrina looked over her shoulder to see the

Ford pulling over and the sheriff's car pulling in behind it.

Throwing an airy wave to the occupants of the car, she galloped on.

The driveway that circled around to the lake side of the chalets, then on to the parking lot, was on the near side of the hotel. Sabrina decided she had better dismount there instead of either riding up to the front door or going beyond it to the main entrance into the parking lot.

Bringing the stallion to a halt, she slid from his back and put her arm about his neck.

"Thanks, big fellow," she said. "You performed like a thoroughbred."

The horse nuzzled her neck. Patting his flank, she pulled him around by the mane to face in the direction of home, gave him a sharp slap on the rump and cried, "Home, boy! Run for home!"

Whinnying, the horse galloped off in the direction of the farm. Unless the sheriff's deputies who had stopped the Ford decided he was a runaway horse and did something silly such as roping him, Sabrina was sure the stallion would get home without trouble. Any horse intelligent enough to obey knee commands, jump like a steeplechase champion and run like a racehorse certainly ought to be able to find his way home. It was possible his owner wouldn't even realize he had been gone.

She watched as the stallion galloped past the parked Ford and the sheriff's car. The two deputies gazed after him, but apparently decided what they were doing was more important than chasing a horse. What they were doing was giving Karl Janoski a sobriety test. Sabrina watched with amusement as the one deputy steered Karl toward the other, making him walk a straight line by placing the heel of one foot to the toe of another.

Sabrina had no desire to walk through the hotel lobby in her disheveled condition. Heading along the driveway leading to the chalets, she left it halfway along to cut across to one of the winding paths, then left it to cut across the grass to the porch of the suite.

Climbing the railing, she went in by the sliding glass door, unobserved by anyone.

Neither of the other girls was in the suite. Spotting a note on the writing table next to the letter she had written to her father, Sabrina went over to read it. It was in Kelly's handwriting, and read:

Dear Sabrina,

Charlie called. Paul Kuznicki and Karl Janoski are a couple of hit men from San Francisco. A Mateusz Krzal works for Walther Bartkowiak at the Polish consulate in Los Angeles, and Jill saw a man answering the description Charlie gave of him come from the chalet. Veech could be Veechek Nowak, a suspected Commie spy the FBI recently lost track of. Fits the description of the dude you suspect isn't Anton Rabitch. Charlie hadn't heard back from London yet, but will phone again as soon as he gets Rabitch's description.

Charlie couldn't get us seats at the banquet, but suggested we try to get waitress jobs. I checked that out, and you need FBI security clearance, which is impossible on this short notice.

At the moment we're watching the chalet, waiting for the fat man to step out for a breather, so we can check out the place. The other occupant, who we think is Mateusz Krzal, left in a panel truck a while ago, and Kuznicki and Janoski took off in a Ford sedan, so Bartkowiak is the only one there aside from the prisoners. Jill fixed the door so we can get in, if Bartkowiak ever leaves.

Love,
Kelly

P.S. The panel truck just came back and is parked behind the chalet. I'm going to pull Jill's car around where I can see the truck, so I can follow it in case it takes off again.

So they watched the Ford sedan leave, Sabrina thought wryly, never suspecting she was in its trunk.

The phone rang and she answered it.

Charlie's voice said, "Hi, angel. All three of you there?"

"Just me, Charlie," Sabrina said. "I just returned from being taken for a ride by two hit men. I don't know where Jill and Kelly are."

"Hit men?" Charlie said. "Those two I identified?"

"Uh-huh, only I didn't know they were hit men at the time. I just read a note left by Kelly, briefing me on your last call."

"Then you're up-to-date. How'd you get away from Kuznicki and Janoski?"

"It's a long story, Charlie. Suffice to say I'm in one piece, more or less, but I ruined a two-hundred-dollar pantsuit I'm going to put on my expense account."

"This is your private caper, angel, not an agency case. I'm just helping out."

"You're making me pay for my ruined pantsuit?" Sabrina said in a tone of outrage.

"Don't get excited, angel. There must be a women's dress shop in that hotel. Why don't you just charge a new one to your hotel bill? I'm picking that up."

"What's the difference between that and putting it on an expense bill?"

"Bosley, Sabrina. Can you imagine trying to explain to Bosley an expense account item such as that?"

Sabrina chuckled. "No, I'd hate to try to explain a pantsuit to Bosley. Have you heard from London yet?"

"What I'm calling about. Anton Rabitch is thirty-five, tall, dark hair, slim and well-groomed."

"Sounds like the man here," Sabrina said with disappointment.

"Not quite, angel. He's described as quite handsome. And definitely has no hook nose."

"Then the man here is an imposter!"

"Definitely," Charlie said.

"Charlie," Sabrina said, "do you think I should tell the FBI people protecting the professor that Rabitch isn't Rabitch?"

There was a period of silence before her boss replied,

"Sabrina, my contact at the FBI said they're not protecting Wycinski."

It was Sabrina's turn to be silent. Eventually she said, "The head FBI man is named John Haller. I overheard him say that officially they were protecting only the Assistant Secretary of State. For reasons of protocol, he said."

"That could be," Charlie said thoughtfully. "Washington wouldn't want to offend a government with which we have diplomatic relations by seeming to coddle its most outspoken critic. But you can't take the chance that this John Haller isn't an imposter too."

"Maybe I should contact the sheriff's department."

"No, that's out, angel. The State Department gave me a cautious go-ahead to investigate whatever's going on there, but stressed keeping it undercover. They want no waves. Anything you three girls do, you'll have to do on your own. Did the other girls check out my suggestion about getting waitress jobs?"

"Yes. Kelly's note says you need security clearance." Glancing at her watch, she saw it was a quarter after six. "I don't suppose there's any chance of your arranging that within the next forty-five minutes."

"Hardly, angel. Let me think a minute."

After a short period of silence, Charlie said, "Only thing feasible on this short notice is to substitute for one of the waitresses. Get one out of there somehow, and take her place."

"Bribe her?" Sabrina asked.

"That might backfire. If she reported it, you might find yourself in the slammer."

"So what do you suggest?"

"I'm still thinking, angel. Just hang on."

After another period of silence, Charlie said, "There's a lawyer over that way who owes me a sizable favor. I have the glimmer of an idea. Let me make a phone call and get back to you."

"All right, Charlie. If you don't get an immediate answer, let it ring. I'm going to be in the shower."

"You're going to take time out to shower this close to the banquet?"

Sabrina said, "Charlie, if you saw me, you'd understand. I look like something the cat dragged in."

"You must have had an interesting experience, angel. I look forward to hearing the details. I'll call back as soon as I can."

Sabrina had showered and had changed from her pantsuit to a clean dress by the time Charlie phoned back. By then it was twenty of seven.

"This is cutting it pretty close," he said, "but we're all set: pick some gullible-looking waitress and tell her you're the legal secretary for Attorney James Fisbee. Got that?"

"Attorney James Fisbee," Sabrina repeated. "I'm his legal secretary."

"Pump out of her if any relative of hers died recently. Or if not recently, any time in the past. There's bound to be some relative she recalls dying at some time or other."

"All right, Charlie. Then what?"

"Tell her the will is being probated in Division 27 of the superior court at the County Courthouse at seven-thirty this evening. She has to be there to get her bequest."

"Isn't that kind of a dirty trick?" Sabrina asked.
"Won't the courthouse be closed?"

"Would I plan that kind of a practical joke on a poor working girl?" Charlie said reproachfully. "Judge Orville Phillips holds evening sessions in Division 27 from seven-thirty until nine-thirty in an attempt to reduce a six-month backlog of cases. As soon as the girl leaves, phone Fisbee at 642-1041 to tell him her name and the name of the deceased relative. He'll meet her outside the courtroom."

"What's he going to tell her? That the case has been continued? There won't actually be a probate case called, will there?"

"No, but he'll keep her tied up until court adjourns, by which time the banquet should be over. They'll sit in the courtroom, ostensibly waiting for the case to be called, until almost adjournment time; then Fisbee will

tell the girl he's going to check with the judge to see why it hasn't been called, and will approach the bench. After a whispered conference with the judge, Fisbee will return to tell the girl the court has authorized turning over her share of the estate, and will hand her a check for five hundred dollars."

"You always arrange things so beautifully, Charlie," Sabrina said admiringly. "Just out of curiosity, what will Fisbee say to the judge?"

"I have no idea, Sabrina, except that it will have nothing to do with probate of a will. The judge isn't in on this deception."

"I thought probably not," Sabrina said. She glanced at her watch again. "I'd better hustle. It's a quarter to seven."

Twenty

It was ten to seven when Sabrina got to the kitchen area. She scooted through the kitchen, where a Chinese chef was shouting orders to a half-dozen helpers, along a hallway beyond the kitchen, and finally came to the waitresses' locker room. She looked in the open door to see that it was a long, narrow room with lockers along both walls, and with the swinging doors to a lavatory at the far end.

About twenty girls were putting on freshly starched white uniforms. Entering the room, Sabrina moved among them casually, measuring her size against each of them, and studying their expressions. Finally she came to a halt next to a girl who satisfied both her requirements. She was a freckle-faced strawberry blonde of about Sabrina's height and build, with a bovine expression and the innocent but earthy look of a farm

girl. She was just opening her locker to put her purse into it.

"Pardon me," Sabrina said, touching her on the shoulder. "You are . . .?"

Gazing at her wide-eyed, the girl said, "Mary."

"Mary—er . . .?"

"Jeffers."

"Right," Sabrina said, brightening. "Mary Jeffers. I'm Sabrina Duncan."

"Sabrina Duncan?" Mary repeated puzzledly.

"Mr. James Fisbee's legal secretary," Sabrina said encouragingly. "Surely you know Mr. Fisbee."

"Oh, the lawyer. No, I don't know him, but I've heard of him."

"Fine. He's executor of the estate."

"The estate?"

"Your mother's maiden name was . . .?"

"Johnson," the girl said in a puzzled voice.

"Right. Susan Johnson."

"Evelyn Johnson," Mary corrected.

Smiling, Sabrina said, "There's just no tripping you up, is there?"

Shrugging, the girl said, "Big deal. I know my mother's first name."

"One more question," Sabrina said. "And consider very carefully before you answer. A great deal could depend on it. Is there someone related to you whom you haven't seen for a very long time who recently passed away?"

Now thoroughly intrigued, Mary gave this some thought, oblivious to the fact that most of the other waitresses were now in uniform and were leaving the locker room.

After a time she said slowly, "Well, I had an aunt—er—her name was . . ."

When she let it trail off, the aunt's name eluding her, Sabrina said excitedly, "Yes? Yes?"

"Aunt Margaret!" Mary said triumphantly. "On my father's side. She was really my great-aunt, because she was my father's mother's sister, but we all called her Aunt Margaret. Her last name was, er . . ."

"Yes?" Sabrina urged. "Yes?"

"Bendix. Margaret Bendix."

"Then you are the right Mary Jeffers," Sabrina said in a tone of relief. She took Mary's purse out of the locker and pressed it into her hands. "Mary, the County Courthouse, Division 27 of the superior court. Judge Phillips. Your great-aunt Margaret's will is due to be read at seven-thirty."

"Her will?"

Nodding, Sabrina said, "If you leave now, you'll make it just in time."

Clutching her purse, the girl said, "But my job."

"I've spoken to your boss. Everything's arranged. One of the standby girls is all ready to take over. Which is your station?"

"Six."

"Don't worry about a thing," Sabrina said, pushing her toward the door. "County Courthouse, Division 27, Judge Phillips. Mr. Fisbee will be waiting for you outside the courtroom."

A trifle dazedly, Mary said, "Mr. Fisbee, right. Division 27."

She hurried along the hallway. Sabrina ran over to a wall phone, dropped in a dime and dialed 642-1041.

In the middle of the first ring, a male voice answered, "Fisbee."

"Sabrina Duncan, Mr. Fisbee," Sabrina said. "The girl is named Mary Jeffers and she just left. I told her you were executor of her great-aunt Margaret Bendix's estate. Aunt Margaret was her father's mother's sister."

"Good work, Miss Duncan," the lawyer said. "I'll meet her at the courthouse."

Hanging up, Sabrina hurriedly put on Mary Jeffers' white uniform. As she stuffed her purse onto the shelf, she noted a pair of harlequin glasses studded with rhinestones lying on the shelf. There was also a box of rubber bands on the shelf.

Deciding that at least a minor disguise was desirable, to avoid recognition by the FBI men or the fake Anton Rabitch, Sabrina quickly fixed her hair in a

ponytail that drew it tightly back from her forehead, and put on the glasses. They distorted her vision slightly, but not enough to cause her to bump into things.

By now all the other waitresses had left for the kitchen. Sabrina rushed there too, to find the girls lined up at the salad bar, loading salads on trays.

The Chinese chef, a round-bodied man with a moon face, was yelling, "Six! Where is waitress six!"

"Here," Sabrina said breathlessly, running to him.

Taking her arm, he pushed her between two other girls in line. "You fit here," he said. "Between five and seven."

The chef moved off to yell at some loitering busboys. Sabrina peered ahead to see what the girls were doing when they reached the salad bar. It didn't look very complicated. They were loading dishes of already-prepared salad onto trays, them moving out to the dining room.

The large blonde ahead of Sabrina turned to ask, "What happened to Mary?"

"Called away," Sabrina said vaguely. "I'm her replacement. How many salads do I take?"

Looking slightly surprised by the question, the blonde said, "Ten."

"And where is station six?"

Looking even more surprised, the blonde replied. "I'll point it out to you when we go out into the dining room. Didn't Ching give you any briefing?"

Sabrina shook her head.

"Ever wait tables before?"

Sabrina shook her head again.

"Good grief!" the big blonde said. "Well, I'll try to give you a crash course, and if you get in trouble, I'll carry you. What's your name?"

"Sabrina."

"I'm Gladys. If you need help, give me the high sign. All you have to do is deliver food. Busboys will clear away the dirties. They also set up, including the wine, which is why we didn't have to get here until just before seven. You serve the salad first, then

soup, then the main course, then dessert and coffee. Except that when you serve the salad, you ask if anyone wants coffee early. Got it?"

"Got it," Sabrina said. "Thanks, Gladys."

"You're welcome, kid."

They reached the salad bar and both began loading their trays. Sabrina watched Gladys balance her tray on one hand and tried to imitate her. When the tray started to tilt, she decided she had better steady it with her other hand, however.

She followed the big blonde into the dining room.

Twenty-one

The dining room was large, and the two hundred guests were seated at twenty separate tables for ten, each with its own waitress. The tables were oblong, with four chairs on each side and one at either end. Two decanters of rosé wine were on each table, and some of the guests were already sipping it.

At the far end of the room was an elevated stage with a lectern and a microphone on it. Behind the lectern was a display of the United States flag, the flag of Poland, and the flag of the United Nations.

The table closest to the stage was the VIP table. Sabrina spotted Professor Wycinski seated there, flanked by the Assistant Secretary of State on his right and the fake Anton Rabitch on his left.

"Station six is right there," the blond Gladys said, pointing. "Now, remember, everything gets served from the left. Not just the salad, but everything."

"Got it," Sabrina said.

Table six was in the center of the room, about twenty feet from the VIP table. Finding that the

glasses she was wearing were beginning to distort her vision more and more, Sabrina dipped her head, letting them slide forward on her nose so that she could peer over the rims, before she started for her table.

Setting her tray on the tray holder near her table, Sabrina glanced around before starting to serve her salads. John Haller and his two FBI assistants stood with their backs to the wall in three different parts of the room instead of being seated at tables, carefully studying the crowd. Professor Wycinski was in earnest conversation with the Assistant Secretary. The gaze of the fake Anton Rabitch, moving about the room, briefly rested on Sabrina without recognition, then moved on.

On the principle that having all alternate escape routes planned in advance, in case of trouble, was sound tactics, Sabrina gave careful attention to the geography of the room. There were side-by-side one-way doors to the kitchen, one opening outward, the other opening inward. On the left side of the room was the main door into the lobby, a double door with both sides closed. On the right side was an emergency fire exit. Straight ahead was the stage, which Sabrina saw might furnish a fourth escape route, if necessary.

On each side of the stage was a curtained archway behind which she assumed were steps leading up to the wings of the stage. If the stage was similar to most she had seen, it would have exits off its wings.

Sabrina began distributing the salads, remembering to serve from the left. They were tossed salads, with blue-cheese dressing, served in small wooden bowls resting on saucers. She had distributed eight when she remembered she was supposed to ask if anyone wanted coffee.

Holding the last two salads, one in each hand, she asked, "Anyone wish coffee now?"

She was standing slightly behind the chairs of an elderly gentleman with flowing white hair and a long, thin nose, and a thin, middle-aged woman. The elderly man turned his head toward her and said, "I do."

Sabrina was holding the salad in her left hand right

over his shoulder. The sudden turn of his head put his long nose right into it, flustering both of them. As he wiped the salad dressing from his nose, she set down the last two salads simultaneously, serving the woman to his right from the left side, as she was supposed to, but thrusting his in front of him from his right.

She got the woman's in front of her all right, but the elderly man's bowl slid off the saucer to upend on the tablecloth in front of him.

"Oops!" Sabrina said. "Sorry about that."

Reaching across him, she picked up the bowl and saucer and used the saucer as a scoop to push most of the salad back into the bowl. There remained a considerable glob of blue-cheese dressing and a few shreds of lettuce on the tablecloth, but Sabrina didn't know of anything she could do about that. Giving the elderly man a nervous smile, she set the rescued salad before him.

He stared down at it, then up at her, and decided to make the best of it. Picking up his fork, he began to eat it.

By then all the other waitresses had finished serving their salads, and were either pouring coffee or had returned to the kitchen. FBI man John Haller, alert to anything out of the ordinary, began to drift toward the table Sabrina was serving to see what the delay was.

Grabbing up her tray, Sabrina held it vertically, blocking her face from Haller's view, as she hurried toward the kitchen.

A number of girls were in the kitchen, relaxing until they had to serve the next course. Among them was the blond Gladys.

Sabrina said to her, "What do I do with my tray?"

Pointing to a stack of trays at one end of the soup counter, Gladys said, "Stack it there. That's where you'll need it next."

After disposing of the tray, Sabrina returned to ask Gladys, "Where do I get coffee?"

"In the dining room, over against the wall."

Sabrina hurried back out into the dining room. There were serving stations in each of the four corners of the room, she saw, consisting of small metal tables on casters that had glasses of icewater and coffeepots on top of them, and trays for dirty dishes on their lower shelves. Two glass coffeepots were on a double hot plate at each serving station. Sabrina went over to lift a coffeepot from the serving station closest to station six.

Hurrying over to her table, Sabrina stopped behind the elderly man with the long nose, holding the coffeepot poised over his shoulder.

"Coffee?" she asked.

Unaware that she had come up behind him, her voice startled him. He swung his head that way, pressing the end of his nose against the hot coffeepot. Instantly he jerked it away again.

"Oops, sorry!" Sabrina said.

With her left hand she lifted the glass of icewater setting before him and held it in front of his face. "Stick your nose in this."

He dipped the tip of his nose into the water, patted it dry with his napkin, and stared up at her with an expression of unbelieving fascination on his face.

Setting down the glass and pouring his coffee, she asked concernedly, "Take the sting out?"

He nodded, still gazing up at her.

"Anyone else want coffee while I'm here?" Sabrina asked.

The thin woman to the elderly man's right looked as though she were considering it, but after examining Sabrina warily, she gave her head a slight shake. No one else said anything.

Sabrina headed for a different service station to return the coffeepot, because the route took her past the VIP table. As she went past, she tried to get Professor Wycinski's attention by throwing him a worried look. At the moment, he was listening to something the Assistant Secretary of State was saying, but his pre-occupied gaze fell on Sabrina. No recognition showed in his eyes, however, she was disappointed to see.

It was probably just as well he hadn't recognized her, she thought an instant later, when the gaze of the hook-nosed man to the professor's left also briefly touched her. Because if the professor had, probably the fake Anton Rabitch would also have recognized her.

Only one coffeepot was on the hot plate at the service station Sabrina had chosen. She set her pot on the vacant warmer and returned to the kitchen. Moments later another waitress approached the same service station with a coffeepot in her hand. She gazed in bewilderment at the two pots already there, looked around in all directions, and finally carried her pot into the kitchen.

When the busboys began to bring the empty salad bowls into the kitchen, the waitresses lined up to get their soup. Sabrina got behind Gladys in line.

The soup was French onion, in cups with saucers beneath them. Sabrina held her tray aloft on the palm of her right hand but again steadied it with her left.

As she headed for her table, she saw one side of the double door into the lobby open and Paul Kuznicki and Karl Janoski step inside. Instantly all three FBI men were converging on them.

Setting her tray on the tray holder, Sabrina watched as John Haller said something to the two hit men and Kuznicki made some reply. Then all three looked toward the VIP table.

Glancing that way, Sabrina saw the hook-nosed man studying her with a frown on his face. Hurriedly she began to deliver the soup to her table.

As before, she ended with a bowl in either hand, standing slightly back of and between the elderly man with the flowing white hair and long nose, and the middle-aged thin woman to his right. As she set the bowl in her right hand before the thin woman, she inadvertently pushed the other bowl toward the head of the elderly man, unaware of what she was doing because her attention was turned the other way.

This time he was watching. He leaned to his left, his face turned toward the approaching soup bowl

and his gaze fixed on it defensively, pulling back his head like a turtle withdrawing into its shell. He nearly fell sideways off his chair into the lap of the stout woman to his left before Sabrina straightened, raised the bowl slightly and walked around to his left to set it down.

Centering himself in his chair again, he warily leaned the other way until she got it down. She set it down a trifle too hard, sloshing some soup over into the saucer, and incidentally onto her thumb.

"Oh, that's hot!" she said, instantly immersing the thumb in the elderly man's water glass.

Pulling the thumb out again and examining it, she said chattily, "Best treatment for burns there is, ice water, if you use it fast. It's not even red." She peered at his nose. "Kept your nose from turning red too. I'll get you some more water."

"No," he said. "Please don't."

"It's no trouble," she assured him, picking up his glass.

Again she headed for the service station that would take her close to the VIP table. This time Wycinski didn't even look at her, being engrossed in something the Assistant Secretary of State was saying. John Haller was bending over the fake Anton Rabitch from behind his chair.

Sabrina heard the FBI man say, "Over in the doorway leading to the lobby. Say they're members of your organization."

Glancing that way, the hook-nosed man nodded. "Both members of the Freedom Fighters. I brought them along in order to give the professor a little extra protection on the q.t. Let them stay."

Sabrina continued on to the service station, put the glass of water in the dirty-dish tray and picked up another glass of water. When she went by the VIP table carrying it, Haller was heading back for the door and the fake Rabitch was gazing after him.

The elderly man stopped eating his soup and sat tensed, ready to lean either way, when Sabrina brought his fresh water. But nothing disastrous hap-

pemed. He did look a little bemused, however, when she served it from the left. Since she set it down to his right, this involved reaching all the way across him. When she told Sabrina to serve everything from the left, the blond Gladys hadn't explained that she meant only food, and that drinks, which normally were placed on the right, should be served from that side.

As she headed for the kitchen again, Sabrina saw that the door to the lobby had been closed, and that the two hit men were leaning against it, gazing over the room. The three FBI men had spread out once more.

Paul Kuznicki's gaze touched her, and he frowned slightly, as if trying to recall where he had seen her before. Sabrina pushed through the swinging door into the kitchen before he could make up his mind.

Twenty-two

At about five P.M. Walther Bartkowiak said to Mateusz, "You have here anything for dinner?"

The thin man shook his head. "Is store couple of miles away, on main road."

"Then go get something," Bartkowiak instructed. "You know cooking?"

Mateusz shook his head again. "Is no need. Americans have food you have only to put in oven. Is called TV dinners."

The fat man made a face. "Them I have taste. But must eat something. Am informed the fried chicken is not bad. I will have two."

"All right." Mateusz looked at the girls. "And for them?"

"No. Is no use get anything for them."

Mateusz went on out. Jill and Kelly looked at each other.

"Does he mean we won't live long enough to digest it?" Kelly inquired.

The fat man, who was seated at the table, said reasonably, "Is no use waste food. In America too much go in garbage can. In Poland people more frugal."

"*You haven't been saving on food, by the looks of you,*" Kelly told him. "You just ordered enough for two normal people. That's why you're a fat, ugly toad."

"Capitalist pig!" he responded with spirit.

"Communist blob!" Kelly spat at him.

"Rotten imperialist!" he shot back.

"Hey!" Jill said. "You two sound like a couple of grammar-school kids yelling, 'You're a bigger one,' at each other."

"Is beneath dignity to argue with mere woman," the fat man said majestically, rising to his feet and going over to take a look at the still-unconscious Anton Rabitch.

"Women's Lib will get you for that crack," Kelly said to his back.

Ignoring her, the fat man peeled back an eyelid of the unconscious man and peered into the eye. Then he went over to look down at Professor Wycinski.

"Is strange the drug work on him as supposed, but not on you," he said.

The bearded man looked up at him groggily. "Where am I?" he asked in a weak voice.

"In good hands," the fat man assured him.

He was starting to turn away when Wycinski suddenly swung his bound feet around in an arc, driving the toes of both shoes into the fat man's solar plexus. Bartkowiak sat with a crash that shook the cottage, then rolled onto his side, making gasping noises.

There was another crash as the professor rolled himself off the bunk. He began rolling over and over across the room toward Kelly and Jill.

Paralyzed by the blow to his solar plexus, the fat

man remained curled up on his side, continuing to gasp and wheeze. Professor Wycinski managed to work himself over behind Kelly's chair, face up. Raising his bound hands, he began to pick at the knot in the rope holding her wrists.

The door opened and Mateusz's voice said, "You forgot give me money, com—" Abruptly, he ran over to kick the professor in the side.

With a grunt of pain, Wycinski dropped his bound hands onto his stomach.

Grabbing the professor by the ankles, the thin man dragged him over next to the bunk he had rolled from. Then he ran to bend solicitously over the fat man, who was still gasping and wheezing.

"Is all right?" Mateusz inquired. "What did they . . . ?"

Between gasps Bartkowiak managed to get out, "Of course—not all right—you fool!" After a couple of more wheezes he managed to say, all in one breath, "In stomach I am kicked."

Gradually the paralysis disappeared. In about five minutes the fat man was able to sit up. It took another couple of minutes before he was able to stand. Then he started determinedly for the recumbent professor.

"Hold it!" Jill called. "Mateusz already kicked him."

The admonition had no effect. Bartkowiak kicked him in the side, hard. The professor emitted another grunt of pain.

"How you like?" the fat man inquired.

"I no like at all," Wycinski said, mimicking the Slavic accent. "The pretty one is right. You are a fat, ugly toad."

Bartkowiak kicked him again, bringing another grunt of pain from Wycinski. Then he grabbed the professor by the shoulders, told Mateusz to take his legs, and they heaved him back onto the bunk.

Glaring down at him, the fat man asked, "How long you been awake, playing the possum?"

"Long enough to know your filthy plans, comrade. You are making the biggest mistake of your soon-to-

end life. The Freedom Fighters in Exile will hunt you down and kill you for this."

Bartkowiak emitted a derisive chortle. "For what? They will never know what I have done." He turned to Mateusz. "Is fortunate you came back. But why?"

"You heard not what I said when in I came? You forgot give me money."

"Oh." The fat man took out a wallet and handed him a ten. "This time I be more careful. I not go near any of them."

Mateusz went out again. Bartkowiak resumed his seat at the table.

About twenty minutes passed in silence before Mateusz returned, bearing a bag of groceries. The thin man began bustling about in the kitchen area.

The pair ate their TV dinners at the table, under the gazes of the two bound girls and the professor. The fat man was a gobbler, shoveling food into his mouth and chewing noisily. He consumed both of his TV dinners before Mateusz finished his single one. All three of the prisoners eventually averted their gazes from the table because Bartkowiak's greed was making them ill.

It was about six-thirty when the two men finished dinner. A half-hour later Bartkowiak looked at his watch and said to the bound man on the bunk, "Your banquet begins, professor."

Professor Wycinski said nothing.

"Would interest you to know what you will say in your speech, professor?"

"No," Wycinski said.

Frowning at him, the fat man heaved himself to his feet. Nodding toward the two girls, he said to Mateusz, "Is time to take care of these two."

"It will not dark be for another hour or two," the thin man objected.

"Will not take out in boat until after dark," Bartkowiak said impatiently. "But can put them in boat now. You have necessary items in boat?"

"The tire chains, yes."

"Then may as well get them out there."

Casually he drew his Luger, flicked off the safety and walked over in front of Jill. Both girls' faces became chalk-white.

He was leveling the gun at Jill's head when he stopped to listen to the sound of a car approaching along the lane. Mateusz ran over to part the drapes in order to peer out a window. They could hear the car come to a halt, the engine die, and a car door slam.

"Is stranger," Mateusz said. "Never saw before."

Flicking the safety back on, the fat man put away his gun and waddled quickly over to the door. He went out and closed it behind him. Mateusz let the drapes fall closed and stood waiting.

Those inside could hear Bartkowiak say, "Yes? Is look for someone?"

The distinctive voice of John Bosley said, "Just happened to be in the neighborhood, and dropped by to see how you're enjoying your stay. I'm George W. North, owner of this cottage. Are you Mr. John Smith?"

There was a short silence before Bartkowiak's voice, stammering slightly, said, "Ah—John Smith—yes. I am your tenant, John Smith."

"Well, it's certainly a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Smith. Shall we go inside?"

This was followed by dead silence. Mateusz had started to push aside the drapes again when the door reopened and Bartkowiak came back inside with Bosley close behind him. Mateusz started to reach into his pocket, but froze when Bosley wagged the muzzle of the fat man's Luger at him. He was carrying it in his left hand. His right held his own gun, pressed into the fat man's back.

"Put your hands atop your head, please," Bosley instructed Mateusz.

When the thin man complied, Bosley shoved Bartkowiak farther into the room, dropped the Luger into his pocket and held his snub-nosed .38 revolver on Mateusz as he took from the man's pocket the .32 Mateusz had originally taken from Kelly. Bosley dropped it into his other coat pocket. After patting the thin man in other places where he might have a

weapon concealed, and finding no others, Bosley told him he could drop his hand to his sides.

Beaming around the room, Bosley said, "Looks like a jolly party. Good evening, ladies." He looked at the bound professor. "And you, sir." Regarding the unconscious figure in the other bunk, he said doubtfully, "And you also, sir, if you can hear my voice."

Jill said, "Bosley, will you untie us?"

"Yes, I was planning to do that." He peered benignly at both girls. "Are you two all right?"

"I'm unharmed," Jill said. "They beat Kelly with a thick rope. She has some terrible welts on her back."

Bosley's beaming smile disappeared. He took a step toward the fat man.

"No, Boz!" Kelly said quickly.

Halting, Bosley regarded Bartkowiak's face contemplatively, then shrugged. "I was planning something disgustingly uncivilized; namely, rearranging his features with a gun barrel. I apologize for my momentary loss of control."

"Understandable, Bosley," Jill said. "I felt similar rage while I was watching it. But please just untie us."

Keeping the two men covered, Bosley went over behind Jill and unknotted the rope around her wrists with his left hand. He let her untie her own ankles while he undid Kelly's wrist bonds.

When the girls were both untied and on their feet, Bosley took the Luger from his pocket and held it out, butt first. "May as well distribute the weapons. Which one of you prefers this to the revolver?"

"Let Jill have it," Kelly said. "The revolver is mine. Or Charlie's, really, since I charged it to him."

Jill accepted the nine-millimeter automatic and thrust it into the waistband of her skirt, pulling her sweater over the butt to conceal it. When Bosley handed Kelly the revolver, she lifted her purse from the table and dropped the gun into it.

"Shall we use the same rope to bind our prisoners?" Bosley asked.

"Why not?" Kelly said. To Bartkowiak and Mateusz she instructed, "Gentlemen, please have seats."

While Kelly was expertly tying the two men to the same chairs she and Jill had been bound to, Jill went over to untie the professor's bonds. When he was free, the big man climbed to his feet and tenderly felt his ribs. Bosley put away his gun.

"No broken ribs, I think," the professor decided. He smiled at Bosley. "You arrived most opportunely, friend. I am Professor Peter Wycinski."

Bosley looked surprised. "My pleasure, professor. John Bosley." He offered a cordial handshake, then nodded toward the unconscious man. "The real Anton Rabitch?"

"Yes. You have a car outside, I believe?"

Bosley nodded.

"I must ask a favor of you. I must get to a banquet at the Mountain Tarn Hotel at once. It started at seven, and an impostor plans to make a speech in my place."

Looking at his watch, Bosley said, "It's only a few minutes after. The speech can't be before eight, so we have plenty of time." Turning to the girls, he asked, "Where's Sabrina?" When both their expressions became woebegone, he asked with concern, "What's the matter?"

Nodding toward the fat man, Jill said, "We think the toad had her killed. I overheard the fake Anton Rabitch tell him that Sabrina had been taken care of. The way he said it, I'm sure he meant she was dead."

Gazing at the fat man, Bosley said, "Did you have her killed, you miserable mountain of flesh?"

"I not required to answer questions," Bartkowiak said defiantly. "Furthermore, both Mateusz and I protected by diplomatic immunity. You in big trouble if we not released."

"Diplomatic immunity is no protection against a bullet in the head," Bosley said, drawing his gun.

"Bosley!" Kelly said sharply.

Glancing at her, Bosley put away his gun and smiled sheepishly. "I happen to be quite fond of Sabrina, and the thought of this monstrosity . . ." Letting the sentence die, he said simply, "Please don't leave us alone."

The man arouses an uncustomary rage in me." Then, turning to the professor, Bosley said, "There has to be a short delay, professor. It's urgent that I phone my employer. I need his permission to commit a couple of murders."

Going over to the wall phone, he dialed 1-213, then a seven-digit number. Jill and Kelly went over to stand either side of him, their heads bent to catch both ends of the conversation.

When Charlie Townsend's familiar voice said, "Hello," Bosley began, "I'm afraid I have some terrible news, Charlie. We have reason to believe Sabrina has been killed."

"Not unless it happened in the last twenty minutes," Charlie said. "I was talking to her on the phone then."

"Oh?" Bosley said with vast relief. "Where?"

"At the girls' suite at the hotel. There was an attempt on her life this afternoon by those two hit men, but she got away. She hadn't time to give me the details. If you want to contact her, phone the kitchen at the hotel. She should be waiting tables at the banquet."

Putting her mouth close to the phone, Kelly asked, "How did you arrange that, Charlie?"

"It took some ingenuity, angel. Is Jill there too?"

"Right here, Charlie," Jill said.

"Have you girls as yet figured out what's going on there?"

"Sure," Jill said. "The reason they brought along that master makeup artist is that they ran in a substitute for Professor Wycinski. Turned out the professor was the second prisoner they were holding. Their plan is to have the fake professor make a speech that will help the Polish regime and embarrass its critics."

"You've rescued the professor?"

"Yes, Charlie," Bosley said. "And we're heading for the hotel right now."

"Better hurry," Charlie said. "But try not to make it a confrontation. I'm sure the State Department still

wants this handled quietly. If possible, just substitute the professor for his stand-in without letting anyone know there was a stand-in."

"All right, Charlie," Bosley said. "I'll get back to you later." Hanging up, he announced to the two bound men, "You two are in luck. I'm not going to have to kill you after all." Then to Wycinski he said, "Let's go, professor."

"What about *him*?" Jill asked, pointing to the unconscious Anton Rabitch. "Shouldn't he be taken to a hospital?"

Wycinski said, "According to conversations I overheard, he will sleep until morning, and awaken no worse for wear. He was given the same drug they gave me, and I feel fine. He can sleep here as well as in a hospital, and with less publicity."

"That makes sense," Bosley said. "Let's get moving."

As they started out, Bartkowiak called, "You leave us here, perhaps to starve?"

Jill said over her shoulder, "You could live on your fat for a month, Walther."

As they climbed into Bosley's car, the two girls in back, Kelly said, "Jill's car is parked behind the next cottage, only fifty yards beyond here, Boz. If you drop us off there, we'll follow you in."

"I guess we still have time," Bosley said. "That shouldn't take more than a minute."

Twenty-three

When it came to the main course, which was roast beef, mashed potatoes with gravy, and peas, the waitresses carried only five dishes at a time, piled atop each other with metal ring dividers. Sabrina man-

aged to distribute her first five without mishap. As she returned toward the kitchen, she glanced toward the door into the lobby and saw the two hit men still standing there. Again Kuznicki was frowning her way. He said something to the heavyset Karl, who started to look her way too.

Sabrina swung the tray up alongside her face and hurried on into the kitchen.

When she returned, carrying her second tray of dinners, her gaze automatically swung toward the main door again. This time the two hit men were both looking toward the VIP table. She looked that way too and saw Wycinski eating and the fake Anton Rabitch pouring the professor a glass of wine.

Sabrina set her tray on the tray holder and began to distribute the last five dinners. As usual, she got to the elderly gentleman last. Periodically she had been throwing glances at the two hit men, and just as she reached for the last plate on the tray, she saw that their attention was again on her. Both began to circle along the wall to a closer point to her in order to get better looks.

Nervous, her attention more on the hit men than on what she was doing, Sabrina gripped the plate so that her thumb was in the mashed potatoes. When she set it down in front of the elderly man and removed her thumb, gravy began to pour out of the crater in the center of the mashed potatoes like flowing lava. The elderly man looked down at it in wonder, then up at Sabrina, a long-suffering expression on his face.

"Oh, excuse me," Sabrina said, reaching across him to daintily repair the rupture with her fingers.

She ran for her tray, leaving the man to gaze after her in disbelief, grabbed up the tray, swung it up alongside her face to block it from the view of the two hit men and sped for the kitchen.

After disposing of her tray, Sabrina went over to the sink to wash gravy from her hands. Nearby, the moon-faced Chinese chef was showing a college-student dishwasher how to clean a pot that had been burned on the inside.

"Scrubbing is only way," he instructed. "Lots of scouring powder and lots of elbow grease. All the burn must be gotten out, or it will taste in next thing cooked."

The kitchen phone rang. The chef let it ring several times before going over to answer it.

"Kitchen," he said. "Ching speaking. What do you want?"

After listening, he said, "Who? Sabrina? No one named Sabrina works here."

Running over to him, Sabrina said, "Excuse me."

The chef waved her to be silent.

"I know everyone works here," he said. "I tell you, no one named Sabrina. Absolutely not."

"I'm Sabrina," Sabrina said in his free ear.

The chef stared at her, then said into the phone, "Here she is," and handed the phone to her. He returned to the dishwasher.

"Hello?" Sabrina said into the phone.

Jill's voice reached her. "Sabrina? Listen very carefully. Kelly and I are in the car, a couple of miles out of town and coming in. We're following Bosley's car."

"Bosley? What's he doing here?"

"It's a long story that will keep. Bosley has Professor Wycinski with him."

Sabrina took the phone from her ear to stare at it, not sure she had heard right because of the noise in the kitchen. Putting it back to her ear again, she said, "You've got Wycinski with you?"

Jill said, "He was the second one they were holding in the chalet, not his son Jon. Jon is in a San Francisco hospital with a broken leg."

Her mind spinning, Sabrina said, "You've got the Professor with you, I've got him with me. What we got is a double."

"Right—a switch, a ringer. Remember Charlie saying that Mateusz Krzal was one of the world's top makeup artists?"

It began to make a little sense to Sabrina. She nodded to herself. "The ringer didn't recognize me in the lobby because he never saw me in our room. Okay,

okay, fine. Lovely. So now the big question: what's going on? Why the switch? Why?"

"Because of just what you told us. What the professor says publicly is very heavy stuff."

"Of course," Sabrina said. "So if someone wanted him misquoted—"

"Uh-huh," Jill said. "They could do a hell of a lot of damage. Sabrina, we talked to Charlie, and he said the State Department wants this handled quietly. If possible, we want to substitute the professor for the imposter without anyone in the audience being aware of it. You'd better get to that FBI man, Haller, explain the problem and work out with him before we get there some method of making the switch."

"I'm not sure Haller and his men aren't fakes too."

After a period of silence, Jill said, "That's just dandy. We'll be there in minutes. Think you can find out before then?"

"I'll try," Sabrina said. "Bring the professor in through the kitchen. I'll try to have everything worked out."

As she hung up, Gladys called from the line of waitresses waiting at the dessert counter, "Sabrina! Dessert time!"

Sabrina hurried over to get into line.

The dessert was apple pie à la mode. As she emerged from the kitchen carrying her tray, she looked for Kuznicki and Janoski. They were still at the nearest point along the wall from table six, but they weren't looking her way because John Haller was speaking to them. As Sabrina set her tray on the tray holder, the three men moved along the wall to the curtained archway to the right of the stage and disappeared through it. A moment later they appeared on the stage and went over to examine the lectern and microphone. Obviously they were making a security check of the stage before the speaker stepped onto it.

Sabrina switched her attention to the VIP table. Even though she now knew he was an impostor, the bearlike man there still looked to her exactly like Professor

Wycinski. He and the others at his table were already eating their desserts.

As Haller and the two hit men came back through the curtained archway into the room, Sabrina began to distribute her desserts. Kuznicki and Karl, perhaps at Haller's instruction, remained near the curtained archway. The FBI man went over to the VIP table and said something to a stout man seated there.

The stout man rose to his feet, crossed to the curtained archway, disappeared through it, then walked out onstage.

He was the master of ceremonies, it developed. Into the microphone he said, "Ladies and gentlemen, may I have your attention?"

As the murmur of conversation gradually died down, the stout man continued, "Ladies and gentlemen, while we're adding an inch or so to our waistlines, with the desserts we promised ourselves we wouldn't eat . . ."

He paused to allow a ripple of laughter. A movement at the VIP table shifted Sabrina's attention that way. The Assistant Secretary of State had turned his chair sideways so as to be able to see the stage better.

Sabrina had served nine of her desserts. She froze with the tenth in her hand when she saw the false Professor Wycinski casually take a small bottle from his pocket, dump a pill into his palm and drop the pill into the wineglass of the Assistant Secretary. The audacity and openness of it stunned her, until she realized that actually he had picked the best possible time to drop the drug or poison. Every eye in the place but Sabrina's was focused on the stage.

Twenty-four

The MC resumed, "Let me take this opportunity to welcome you here on this very momentous occasion. In a time when the world strives desperately for peace, we are blessed with the presence of two gentlemen who are its most formidable proponents."

The hand of the Assistant Secretary drifted toward the deadly glass. Sabrina considered screaming, remembered Jill's admonition—relayed from Charlie—to handle everything quietly, and decided on another course of action.

The MC was saying, ". . . Two men whose untiring devotion to duty has set an example for men of goodwill throughout the world."

Sabrina set the tenth pie plate before the elderly gentleman with the flowing white hair and long nose, picked up his water glass and deliberately tossed its contents into the pie plate, washing the pie, ice cream, the ice from the glass and the water itself into his lap. Setting down the water glass, she scooped up his half-full wineglass and was halfway to the VIP table with it before the elderly gentleman could rise to his feet with an indignant screech.

The MC had just said, "Next week, one of these men will present a most historic resolution to the General Assembly of the United Nations. Tonight he will tell us the nature of that resolution."

He came to a dead stop at the screech of outrage. In the startled silence following the screech, every eye in the room swiveled toward the elderly man, who was standing livid with rage, brushing with a soaked napkin at his drenched and ice cream stained crotch.

No one at all paid any attention to the waitress moving past the VIP table. No one saw her set down a wineglass next to the glass of the Assistant Secretary and pick up his. But everyone in the room noticed her a moment later when the elderly man pointed an accusing finger her way.

"You!" he shouted. "You did that on purpose!"

Sabrina headed for the kitchen at a rapid walk.

Still pointing his finger at her, in a loud voice the elderly man inquired of the others at his table, "Did you see that? She did it on purpose. She must be some kind of radical!"

The crowd began to whisper, and there were one or two laughs. Sabrina reached the sanctuary of the kitchen, then peered back into the dining room through the little square glass pane in the upper part of the door.

She saw the false Wycinski pick up a wine bottle, refill his own glass, then pour a little into the glass of the Assistant Secretary.

Holding his glass aloft, the bearlike professor said loudly enough to be heard over the murmuring of the crowd, "First, to peace in this room!"

This brought general laughter. Amused, Assistant Secretary Emmet Peters touched his glass to that of the fake professor, and both sipped.

The elderly gentleman gave the MC a get-on-with-it wave and sat down. Again there was laughter, followed by a small round of applause. Then Sabrina saw John Haller heading for the kitchen with a frown on his face, and knew he was coming to find out the reason for her outrageous act. She retreated to the rear of the kitchen, still carrying the wineglass she had lifted from the VIP table.

Haller came into the kitchen, looked around, spotted Sabrina at the other end of the room and moved toward her. Coming to a halt directly in front of her, his eyes widened as he suddenly recognized her.

"You!" he said in a startled voice.

"Wine?" Sabrina asked, extending the glass toward

him. "It was specially prepared for the Assistant Secretary of State."

He gazed at the wine, puzzled.

"Afraid of it?" Sabrina asked.

"Why should I be afraid of it?" he inquired, even more puzzled. "What the devil are you up to?"

"If you take one sip, I'll tell you."

Exasperated, he said, "If that's what it takes to get some sense out of you," and reached for the glass.

Withdrawing it, Sabrina sagged with relief. "Good old Uncle Sam," she said.

Behind her John Bosley's voice broke in. "Sabrina."

She turned to see Bosley leading Professor Wycinski through the kitchen door. Jill and Kelly followed them in. Haller gazed at the professor with a stunned look on his face.

"Is he on our side?" Jill asked, looking at Haller.

"He just passed the test," Sabrina told her. She handed the FBI man the wineglass. "This is either doped or poisoned. It was in front of the Assistant Secretary when the fake Professor Wycinski out there dropped a pill in it. I created that disturbance deliberately, to cover my switch of the glasses."

"What's it all about?" Haller asked in bewilderment, alternately gazing from the wineglass in his hand to Professor Wycinski.

"No time to explain it all now," Bosley said. "The urgent thing is to get the real professor up there onstage without the audience being aware of the switch. The State Department wants no public confrontation."

"A couple of things we'd better take the time to explain . . ." Sabrina said. "Mr. Haller, the man posing as Anton Rabitch is really a Commie spy named Veechek Nowak. And those two buddies of his he told you were Freedom Fighters are a couple of hired hit men from San Francisco."

Nodding, Haller said crisply, "There is a route backstage where you don't have to pass through the audience. Come with me, professor. Miss Duncan, go tell my two assistants to meet me in the right-hand wing backstage at once."

Carrying the wineglass, he led the professor back through the kitchen door. Bosley, Jill and Kelly trailed after them. Sabrina headed the opposite way, for the dining room.

The master of ceremonies was still talking. ". . . So, my friends, what we believe must be spoken. What we feel must be expressed. What we cherish must be protected."

Sabrina headed directly for the nearest of the two FBI men, which fortunately took her nowhere near table six. She whispered in his ear, "Mr. Haller wants both you and your partner backstage in the right wing at once."

"Okay," he said. "Those two Freedom Fighters too?"

"Definitely not," she said. "Don't even mention it to them."

He looked slightly surprised, but he didn't press it. He headed across the room for his partner.

The MC was saying, ". . . We are privileged here tonight to welcome a man who epitomizes the feelings of freedom-loving men, women and children throughout the world. A man who has worked tirelessly and courageously against the forces that oppress the country of his own birth and its neighboring countries. A man who fights for what he knows to be the truth."

Sabrina watched the FBI man speak to his partner, then both move quickly but unobtrusively to the curtained archway to the right of the stage and disappear through it. The fake Anton Rabitch rose from the VIP table and just as unobtrusively moved over to speak to the two hit men. Sabrina wished she could hear what they were saying.

It would have been interesting listening.

Paul Kuznicki asked, "How soon?"

The hook-nosed man said, "The 'professor' will say he's not going to present their resolution to the General Assembly. The crowd will be shocked. Then he'll keep explaining his change of position, until the Assistant Secretary suffers sudden confusion. His convulsions, of course, will bring everything to a screeching halt. The

professor's later suicide, leaving a note confessing to the Assistant Secretary's 'execution' and extolling the present regime in Poland, will end all chance of the resolution ever being presented."

"Okay," Kuznicki said impatiently. "But how soon?"

Veech Nowak turned to look at the VIP table. The Assistant Secretary was just draining his wineglass.

"Three to five minutes," he said.

The master of ceremonies finally ended his long-winded introduction. "Ladies and gentlemen, Professor Peter Wycinski."

The crowd applauded. The bearded man at the VIP table rose to his feet and headed for the curtained archway. The applause continued as he disappeared through the curtain, then a moment later reappeared onstage. It raised in volume as he halted behind the lectern and smiled out over the audience. It gradually died out only when the professor raised his right hand for silence.

When the last handclapping had faded away, Wycinski said, "My country is *not* oppressed by the Communist conspiracy."

Except for Veech Nowak, everyone in the crowd seemed puzzled by this unexpected opening statement. The hook-nosed man smiled with satisfaction.

"It was *raped* by the Communist conspiracy!" Wycinski said.

Nowak looked startled. The rest of the audience visibly relaxed, relieved.

"It was not a rape of the flesh, but of the spirit," the speaker said. "A rape of the mind, which I assure you is a far more heinous crime."

The hook-nosed man, flabbergasted, signaled the two hit men to follow him.

Wycinski was saying, ". . . If you take away a man's right of choice in all things, yes, you rape him. For a man without choice is a man without dreams, hopes, ambitions—which makes him not a man at all."

Nowak and the two hit men climbed the steps to the right wing, then halted in consternation when they found three FBI guns leveled at them. Four folding

chairs were lined up where the people seated on them could view the stage without being seen from the audience. John Bosley, Jill and Kelly were seated in three of them. The fourth was occupied by the fake Peter Wycinski, in handcuffs.

Speechless, the hook-nosed man and the two hit men turned to gaze at the man onstage.

He was saying, ". . . I am here to tell you that it is my intention, my promise, to work tirelessly to return the right of choice to all men."

There was a thunderous round of applause, joined in by Jill, Kelly and Bosley backstage and by Sabrina in the audience.

Several days later Charlie Townsend, putter in hand, was poised over several golf balls lined up on the carpet of his den, talking on the phone via his desk speaker as he practiced puts. He was measuring his words as carefully as he measured the puts.

"Your vacation cost me nothing after all, angels," he said. "The State Department decided to pick up the tab for services rendered, including the five-hundred-dollar check to Mary Jeffers. So I have decided to pay what the vacation would have cost in the form of bonuses. Bosley, will you take care of that?"

"All right, Charlie," Bosley's voice said reluctantly.

"How is your back, Kelly?"

"Mending, Charlie. The doctor said there will be no scars. But I think it's too bad neither the toad nor Mateusz could be prosecuted."

"Diplomatic immunity, angel. But they were sent packing back to Poland in disgrace, where their punishment for failure will probably be considerably harsher than any United States court would mete out. Veech Nowak isn't being charged with anything either, but the State Department is going to try to deport him. He was born in Poland, you know."

"How about those two hit men?" Sabrina's voice asked.

"Unfortunately, the State Department's desire for no publicity got them off the hook for your kidnapping,

Sabrina. But a couple of old murder charges against them have been dug up, and the chances of conviction look promising."

"How about the real Anton Rabitch?" Jill asked.

"Fully recovered. The Assistant Secretary wouldn't have been, though, if Sabrina hadn't made that switch. Analysis of the wine showed very special stuff. Causes brain damage, leaves no trace in an autopsy."

"What have you been doing, Charlie?" Jill's voice asked.

"Some swinging."

"Swinging!" Jill repeated in a shocked voice.

"With my golf clubs," he explained.

There were chuckles from all three girls. Kelly's voice said, "Excellent exercise, Charlie. Good score?"

"No score yet, but I'm giving it my very best shot."

He putted a ball and it rolled into a plastic rug cup, near a lovely young thing splayed out on the floor reading a magazine. She picked it out of the cup and placed it with several others on the rug, thus clearing the cup for the next shot.





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